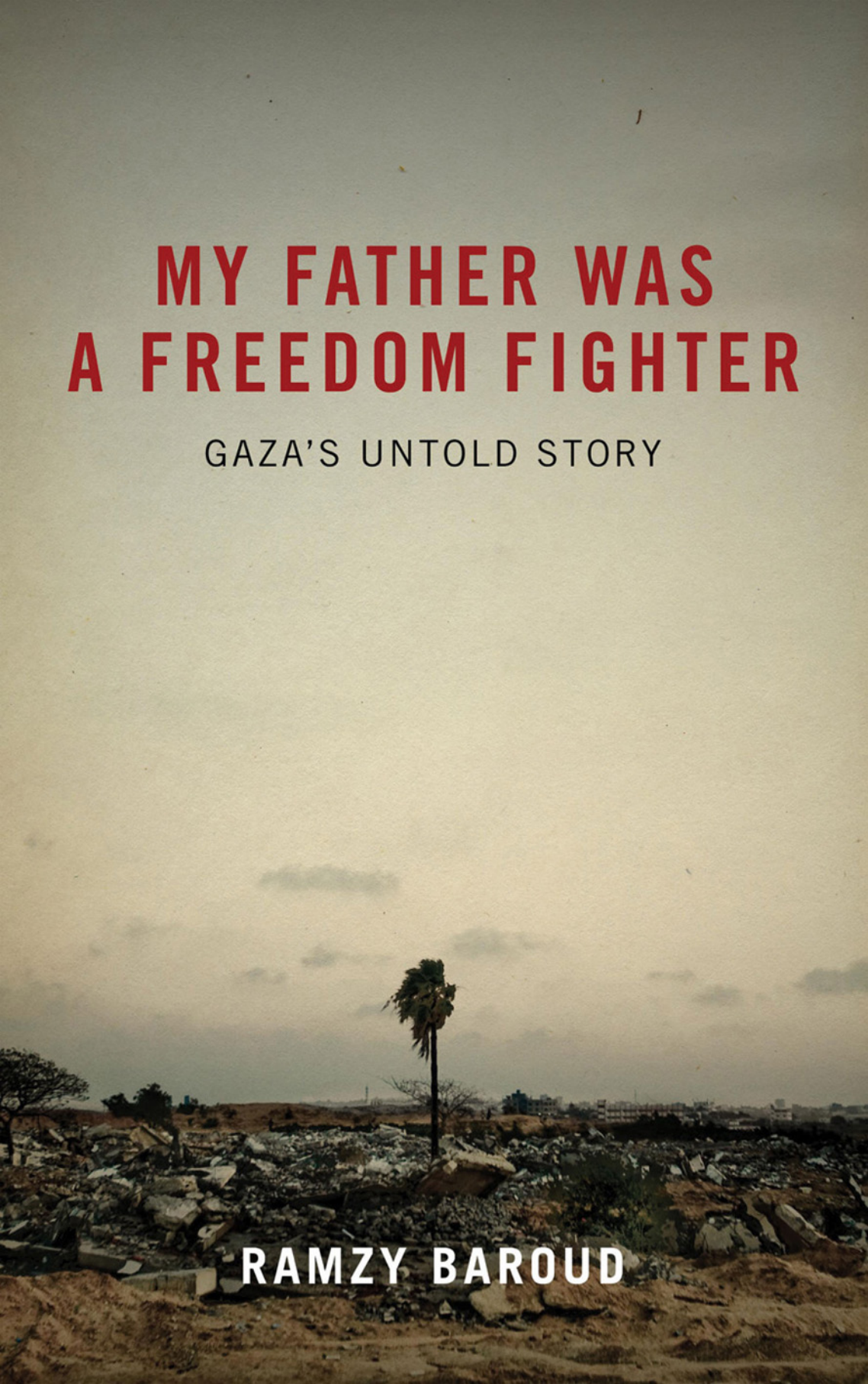
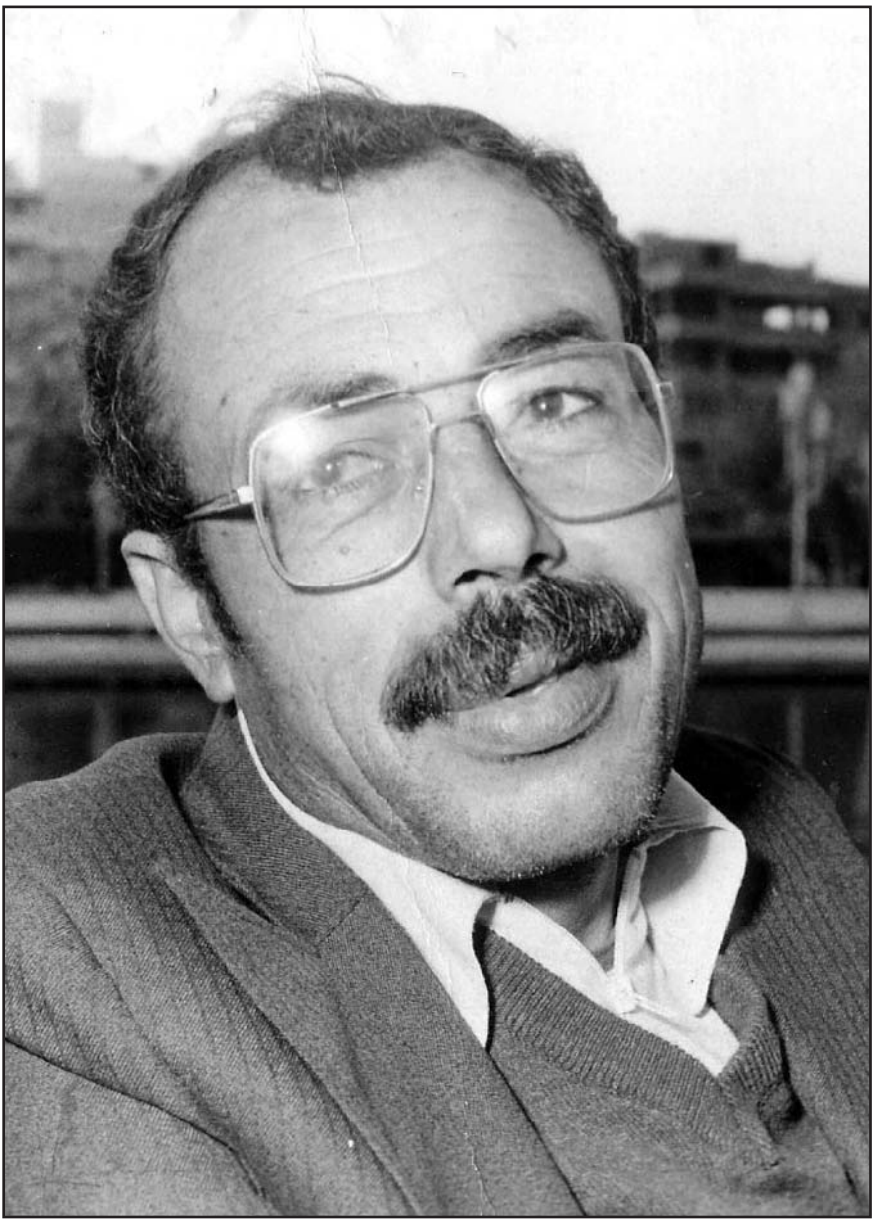
MY FATHER WAS A FREEDOM FIGHTER

GAZA'S UNTOLD STORY



RAMZY BAROUD

My Father was a Freedom Fighter



Cairo, Egypt: Mohammed poses in his favorite café, "Merry Land", 1975.
(Photo courtesy of the author)

MY FATHER WAS A FREEDOM FIGHTER

Gaza's Untold Story

Ramzy Baroud

PlutoPress
www.plutobooks.com

First published 2010 by Pluto Press
345 Archway Road, London N6 5AA and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

www.plutobooks.com

Distributed in the United States of America exclusively by
Palgrave Macmillan, a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

Copyright © Ramzy Baroud 2010

The right of Ramzy Baroud to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7453 2882 9 Hardback
ISBN 978 0 7453 2881 2 Paperback

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data applied for

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental standards of the country of origin.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Designed and produced for Pluto Press by
Chase Publishing Services Ltd, Sidmouth, England
Typeset from disk by Stanford DTP Services, Northampton, England
Printed and bound in the European Union by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

Contents

Acknowledgments ix
Foreword Dr. Salman Abu Sitta xi
Preface xiii
Map xvi

1 Happier Times 1
2 Born into Turmoil 14
3 Taking Flight 26
4 A World Outside the Tent 40
5 Lost and Found 50
6 Zarefah 59
7 Al-Naksa: The Setback 76
8 An Olive Branch and a Thousand Cans of Tomato Sauce 95
9 Strange Men at the Beach Casino 111
10 Intifada: … and All Hell Broke Loose 127
11 Oslo on the Line 152
12 The World as Seen From the Stone Staircase 165
13 Dying, Again 186

Notes 189
Selected Bibliography 200
Index 202

To my parents, Zarefah and Mohammed

Acknowledgments

This book would have never been written without the help, support and encouragement of many individuals, friends, relatives, scholars and activists, to whom I am sincerely grateful and eternally indebted.

Thank you to Um Adel Baroud and Um Mohammed Yazouri, two refugee women and fantastic mothers and grandmothers from Gaza, whose input and personal testimonies were of immense help. A special thank you to Tom Hayes, a scholar and filmmaker, whose assistance in obtaining important testimonies which he has collected throughout the years, allowed me to weave together important events that were otherwise overlooked.

I would also like to thank Dr. Salman Abu Sitta, a leading Palestinian scholar on Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian Nakba of 1948. His intricate research, which he kindly made available to me, made my job of unearthing neglected history much easier. His guidance and support throughout the process of writing this book were invaluable.

My unending gratitude to Rafique Kathwari, an inspiring Kashmiri-American writer, photographer and friend. His poignant suggestions, and thorough proofreading and editing accompanied me to the last paragraph of this book.

I wish to also thank Dr. Roger van Zwanenberg, the Chair and Commissioning Editor at Pluto Press. Thank you, Dr. Zwanenberg, for giving Palestine an important share in the books published by Pluto. Your company has played a major role in enriching libraries and bookstores around the world with a Palestinian narrative that otherwise would have been missing. Also, thank you for supporting me throughout the writing of this book, and for allowing me to tell the story of Gaza, and the story of my father.

Thank you to Zoriah, a world-class war photographer, for so generously making his images available to me. His important work on Palestine, and other areas of conflict and despair throughout the world is truly unparalleled by any standards.

Thank you to hundreds of readers of all backgrounds and all over the world, who sent me messages of support and were eager to read this book. A growing email file with all of your messages kept me going strong as the process lengthened and whenever my enthusiasm weakened.

Thank you to my family, in Gaza and elsewhere for helping me, whether in the research process or in sharing stories, memories and photos, which allowed me to put a complete story together. Thanks to my sister, Dr. Suma Baroud in Gaza, my brother Mustafa in the US, my uncle Farid in Libya and my cousin Maisara in Egypt.

Once again, I stumble before thanking my wife, Suzanne. A simple thank you cannot possibly suffice. She has been my friend, my editor, my proofreader,

and at times, my co-writer. Without her, this book could have never actualized. Thank you.

To my children, amazingly beautiful in every way: Zarefah, ten, Iman, eight, and rabble-rouser Sammy, three—thank you, kids, for putting up with me as I shut myself in my office for many months to write this book.

And finally, to all Gazans, whose story I am attempting to narrate, thank you for holding onto your rights, for your tenacity, your resilience, and for preserving your humanity when many others have lost theirs.

Finally, to all of those who have supported me and my efforts, in any way, to convey a Palestinian narrative—not tainted by politics, not crowded with factionalism and not compromised for any reason—from the bottom of my heart: I thank you.

Foreword

Salman Abu Sitta

"Not one refugee will return. The old will die. The young will forget." Thus uttered Ben Gurion in June 1948, when he had completed the major part of his ethnic cleansing plan to depopulate Palestinians from their villages and replace them with Jews from 110 countries.

By the time he announced the establishment of the state of Israel on Palestine's land in the afternoon of May 14, 1948, the Zionist militia had already succeeded in depopulating 212 villages and three major towns of their Palestinian inhabitants.

Thus over half (56 percent) of all Palestinian refugees became homeless by that day. The Palestinians were supposed to be protected by the British Mandate authority which had been entrusted with carrying the torch of "the sacred trust of civilization" by the League of Nations 28 years earlier.

The British Mandate also did not protect them from half of about 70 massacres in 1948, which occurred during the Mandate to expedite the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes. The infamous Deir Yassin is but one of these massacres, but there were many others, surpassing Deir Yassin in enormity and atrociousness.

When Ben Gurion and company committed these crimes, and declared the state of Israel, there was not a single Arab regular soldier on Palestine soil. Thus the myth of self-defense, or the desperate fight of David against Goliath, which was fed to western audiences for decades, should be laid to rest.

Arab soldiers came to defend the remaining Palestinians after May 15, 1948, but they were outnumbered by the Israelis, had no unified command and no knowledge of the country. They failed to save what was left of Palestine.

When Ben Gurion stood before the representatives of the Jewish immigrants to Palestine in mid-May to announce his state, he in fact announced the victory of 65,000 well-trained Haganah soldiers, led by World War II officers, over defenseless Palestinian villagers who had tilled their fields and lived on their land for thousands of years.

Beit Daras is one of those villages that fell victim to Ben Gurion's ethnic cleansing. Like others, it desperately fought for its existence. It bore the brunt of a devastating attack. It suffered the horrors of a massacre. It defied Ben Gurion's wishful thinking: The old fought with all their means until they died; the young did not forget, and persisted.

Here is one of them. Ramzy Baroud, of the second or third generation of refugees, recalls the odyssey of the people of Beit Daras.

Ramzy is a gifted writer; he eloquently unearthed the recent history of Beit Daras by tracing the life of his father and family from their exodus to

their continuous struggle for survival in exile, for fighting back their enemy, for trying to earn a decent living outside Palestine and for their legendary endurance under the siege and bombardment of Gaza until this day.

Gaza is often portrayed correctly as the most crowded place on earth. No one bothers to say why and how. Gaza is the place of refuge for the people of 247 villages, which were entirely depopulated in 1948. Today, Gaza's population is the same size as the total population of Palestine was in 1948, but with one difference: the Gaza Strip is only 1 percent of Palestine's historic landmass.

This is not a tragedy of World War II, committed in the heat of battle. This is a constant tragedy, which has lasted 61 years so far and is splashed on our television screens every day. No one has the luxury, or the excuse, to hide behind the saying "I did not know."

Ramzy has laid bare this tragedy, true and simple. Its tragedy strikes you as if it was yesterday. And yesterday is today because the tragedy is still here; looking you in the eye, as a still photograph, not a running movie.

Ramzy collected Palestinians' stories and testimonies, a great source for the tragedy of *al-Nakba*, an event ridiculed by the Zionist spin as a product of "oriental imagination," but now gradually accepted by new historians, as these stories correlate with declassified Israeli files.

What is the point now, after 61 years of exile, of Palestinians saying "we told you so"? The point is that Ben Gurion's utterance in 1948 portrays a racist doctrine that still prevails in the Middle East, sowing the region with death and destruction to this day. It is about time that the residents of the English-speaking world open their minds and hearts to the buried story of Palestinians, and stand by the Palestinians and support their rights.

Several dozens of books have been written by the sons and daughters of these depopulated villages mostly in Galilee, but the great majority of these works are in Arabic, though some have been translated into English, for example, the acclaimed *Gate of the Sun* by Elias Khoury.

Ramzy's work is one of the few books written in English about the life, depopulation and struggle for survival (literally) of the people of a Palestinian village in southern Palestine. He portrays their ordeal over six decades, with no end in sight for their suffering. Gathered patiently from the recollections of the survivors, it stands out as an unblemished depiction of their plight. No amount of spin could obliterate this, or could deny the indefatigable persistence of Palestinians to survive and struggle to return home. In writing this book, Ramzy himself, the exiled son of Beit Daras, is proof of this persistence.

Salman Abu Sitta, author and historian, is founder and president of Palestine Land Society, London.

Preface

"Now, you're sure you have your passport?"

"In my pocket, Dad."

"Just check one more time."

"I have, Dad, a hundred times."

"Just humor me, son. You don't want me to die from stress."

"Okay Dad, here is my passport. Here is the army's special permit for the airport. Here is the army's permit to travel in Gaza. Here is my magnetic card to cross the Eretz checkpoint to Israel. I think that about covers it."

"Where is the 8-hour permit to wait for the plane?"

"Right here. It's the same as the Eretz's crossing permit. Believe me, Dad. I've got everything."

The recollection of my father's worn and wise face, standing beside our family home in a Gaza refugee camp, remains as vivid today as the day I left him. He was wearing yellow pajamas and a wrinkled gray robe, both quite likely older than his adult children. Conflicting expressions were gathered on his wrinkled face. His body language told me distinctly that he was upset. But the anger was overpowered by other sentiments. Fear. Regret. Hope. Worry. I had to constantly reassure him that I had everything I needed to be on my way, the only thing left was a father's blessing bestowed on his traveling son. But my father was still relentless.

"Do you have everything you need? Do you have enough money?"

"I do, Dad, just please go in the house, the soldiers could show up any minute."

Another plea from the increasingly irritated taxi driver alerted my father to the inescapable fact that his son was leaving for a distant country, and perhaps, if life remained as it was, he would never see him again. The potency in his voice softened. The officious questioning came to a complete halt, as his eyes filled with tears. His strongest and weakest moments were always separated by a very fine line. The thundering father of many demands and expectations was also a gentle, loving dad who defined his happiness as that of his children, and his misery as the same. As his voice broke into a strand of unintelligible murmurs, the neighbors interfered, urging me to kiss his hands and leave with no further delays. As we finally sped off, I watched from the back window my father's face fixated on the taxi. He was surrounded by local friends. To me, he had never appeared as broken as he did at that moment.

My shame reminded me that I was leaving behind an ailing, distraught father to resume his eternal desolation in a refugee camp in Gaza, while I embarked on building a new life for myself in the United States. This feeling

would stay with me for many years, and it would flood over me when my father died in the refugee camp 15 years later.

But my departure was "absolutely the right thing to do," as my father had often declared, an assertion that was corroborated by any given friend or neighbor that happened to be in his company, especially if that person happened to have children of his own. Life in the refugee camp seemed to create a common denominator, if not a bond, among all the parents, who simply wanted to send their children away to safety. Many times during my youth he smuggled us away to solace in places that allowed him to retrieve us at short notice; thus our prolonged stay in the Gaza Valley, in the house of relatives from whom he was estranged, in an endless orchard of citrus trees, hiding away in a one-room, woven-palm hut that belonged to an old friend, miles from water or electricity. My father's sense of humor was hardly enough to distract us from the grimness of this place. At night, we would hang a blanket for a door, and when wild dogs would close in on the unfamiliar scent of me and my brothers, my heart would palpitate so fast, and the trembling of my body would keep me awake all night. We didn't dare use a flashlight or light a candle because such places were commonly used for young fighters and we couldn't risk being found. It was only at dawn when a faraway minaret would comfortingly announce the call to prayer that sleep came.

Still, from a father's point of view, it was a worthy price to pay to be spared the unpredictable life in a revolting refugee camp, where thousands of soldiers were entrusted with the mission of turning the lives of its inhabitants into a living hell. The graveyard, which immediately bordered our house in the camp, was a busy place during those days. It was the center of many activities, notwithstanding the burial rituals of many of those killed in the daily clashes with the Israeli army. The old graveyard, renamed "Martyrs Graveyard," certainly lived up to its new name, for most of its fallen were youths (often children), who were carried on stretchers, wrapped in Palestinian flags, as solemn crowds of men were followed by weeping mothers, wives and daughters. Of the endless number of processions that stood in the shadow of our house, the burial of a "martyr" was never an ordinary scene. A sinking feeling always came at the sight of a mother slapping her face, pulling her hair, tearing at her clothes, and reaching out to touch her lifeless child one last time.

Although my taxi made it past the Martyrs Graveyard, the water tower, Red Square, the outskirts of the camp, and then into the main road that stretches across the whole of the Gaza Strip, from Rafah in the south, to Beit Hanoun in the north, my thoughts hardly deviated from those I was leaving behind.

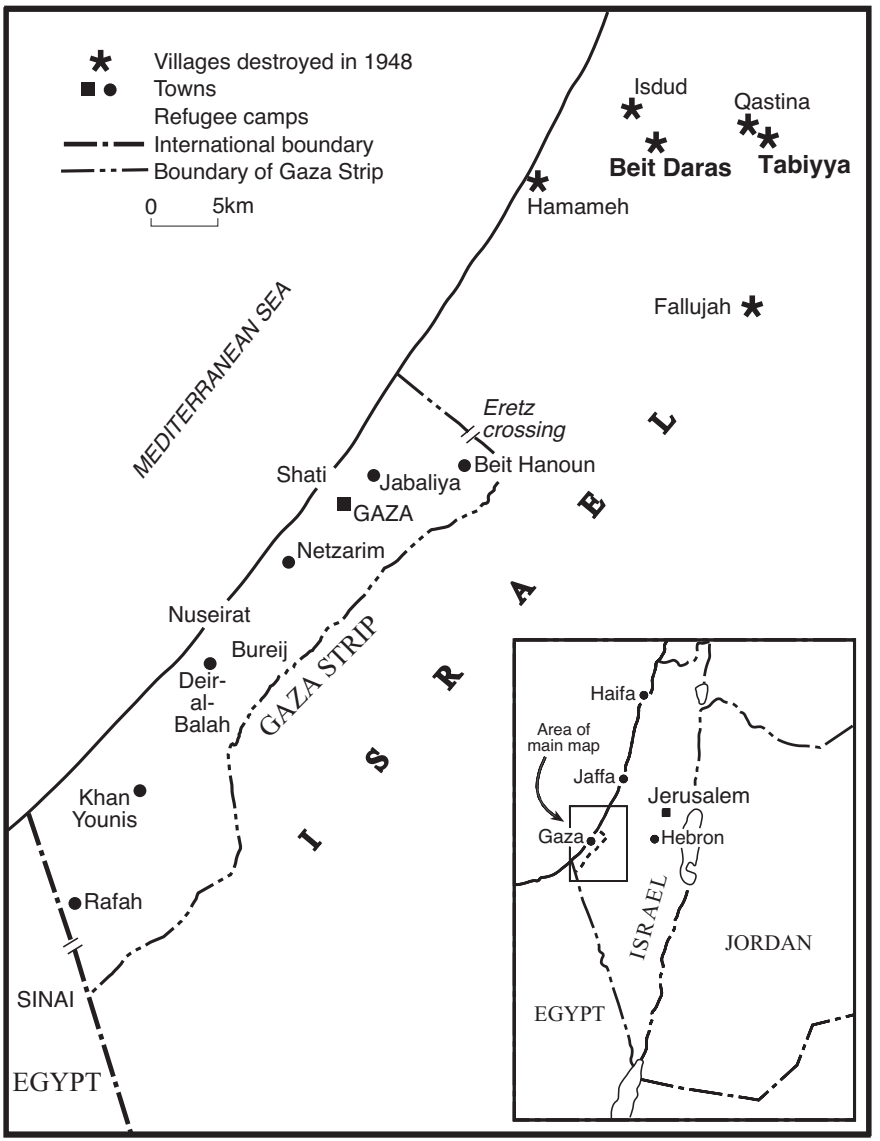
My father: the shy, eccentric warrior. Thanks to him, I am alive today, and my brothers and I have the privilege of telling a story that in many ways is unique to him and to us. In other ways, it resembles the untold story of millions of Palestinians refugees everywhere.

I have found it a great mercy that although my father had to endure the first Palestinian Nakba, among other tragedies, he was spared that grief when Israel carried out a massacre whose magnitude paled only in comparison to similar slaughters executed by Zionist militias in 1948. Starting December 27,

2008 and for many days, Israel carried out a most barbarous attack on the Gaza Strip, coined "Operation Cast Lead," sealing all borders to prevent the flight of civilians, pulverizing entire neighborhoods, killing and wounding thousands, mostly civilians, mostly children and women. It is in the honor of all those innocents, in the honor of my mother and my father, exiles in their own homeland, that I write this book.

If my dad was alive now, he would have preferred that I "kept my big mouth shut." His fears of Israeli intelligence were countless, and every single one legitimate. But now he is gone. Israeli soldiers can no longer raid, search and ravage his house. They can no longer deny him permission to travel for medical treatment. No more humiliation from a smart-ass teenage Israeli soldier at a checkpoint. No more questioning and no more abuse. It is only now that my father has passed away that I can start to tell his story.

And so I begin: "His name was Mohammed Baroud, and he was a good man."


Villages destroyed in 1948
Towns
Refugee camps
International boundary
Boundary of Gaza Strip
0 5km
Isdud
Qastina
Beit Daras
Tabiyya
Hamameh
Fallujah
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Eretz crossing
Shati
Jabaliya
Beit Hanoun
GAZA
Netzarim
Nuseirat
Bureij
Deir-al-Balah
GAZA STRIP
Khan Younis
Rafah
SINAI
EGYPT
ISRAEL
Area of main map
Haifa
Jaffa
Jerusalem
Gaza
Hebron
ISRAEL
JORDAN
EGYPT

1
Happier Times

"Why bother to haul the good blankets on the back of a donkey, exposing them to the dust of the journey, while we know that it's a matter of a week or so before we return to Beit Daras?" he questioned his bewildered wife, Zeinab. Many years later, Grandma Zeinab would repeat this story with a chuckle, as Grandpa Mohammed would shake his head with an awkward mix of embarrassment and grief.

I cannot pinpoint the moment when my grandfather, that beautiful old man with his small white beard and humble demeanor, discovered that his "good blankets" were gone forever, that all that remained of his village were two giant concrete pillars, and piles of cactus. I know that he had never given up hope to return to Beit Daras, perhaps to the same small mud-brick house with the dove tower on the roof.

Beit Daras's inconsequential present existence would evoke little interest, save two concrete pillars, that once upon a time served as an entrance to a small mosque. Its walls, as those faithful to its walls, are long gone, yet somehow, they still insist on identifying with that serene place and that simple existence. On that very spot, on the shoulder of that small hill, huddled between numerous meadows and fences of blooming cactus, there once rested that lovely little village. And also there, somewhere in the vicinity of the two giant concrete pillars, in a tiny mud-brick home, with a small extension used for storing crops and a dove tower on the roof, my father Mohammed Baroud was born.

It isn't easy to construct a history that, only several decades ago, was, along with every standing building of that village, blown to smithereens with the very intent of erasing it from existence. Most historic references of Beit Daras, whether by Israeli or Palestinian historians, were brief, and ultimately resulted in delineating the fall of Beit Daras as just one among nearly 500 Palestinian villages that were frequently evacuated and then completely flattened during the war years of 1947–49. It was another episode in a more complicated tragedy that has seen the dispossession and expulsion of nearly 800,000 Palestinian Arabs. For Zionist Jews, Beit Daras was just another hill, known by a code battle name, to be conquered, as it were. But it should be more than a footnote in David Ben Gurion's *War Diaries*, or Benny Morris's volume, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. It's more than a few numbers on an endless chart, whether one that documents victims of massacres, or estimates of Palestinian refugees still reliant on United Nations food aid. For Palestinians, its fall is one of

many sorrows in the anthology which is collectively known as *al-Nakba*, or the Catastrophe.

My grandparents never tired of reminiscing about their beloved village. My grandfather, also named Mohammed, was often mocked for failing to understand the depth of his tragedy, by insisting that they leave the "good blankets" behind as he herded his children together to escape the village and the intense bombardment. He died 58 kilometers southwest of Beit Daras, in a refugee camp known as Nuseirat.

Beit Daras provided dignity; Grandpa's calloused hands and weathered, leathery skin attested to the decades of hard labor tending the rocky soil in the fields of Palestine. It was a popular pastime for my brothers and I to point to a scar on his battered little body so we could hear a gut-busting tale of the rigors of farm-life. Grandpa ran his fingers over the fading scar on the crown of his head and chuckled: "I got this one at dawn, I went to milk the cow, usually your grandmother's chore, and that cow had it in for me. I squatted behind her, and then everything went black." Tales of being trampled by the donkey or being run over by a plow: potentially life-threatening injuries were all reduced to humorous anecdotes sure to provoke a flood of laughter from his grandchildren.

Grandpa similarly enjoyed reminiscing on the good old days when he had land, a house, chickens, goats, a strong back—everything he needed to provide for his family. Camp life provided nothing from which to harvest a sense of self-respect. Food that once was the fruit of hours of toiling in his own fields was now provided in a burlap bag by some European country or by the United Nations. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges he faced was enduring a life of idleness. One activity, however, that occupied his time was sitting with other men in the camp and discussing the politics of the day, debating just from whom and when liberation would come. Would their lands back home be ready for planting? Would they be able to rebuild right away?

Later in life, someone would give him a small handheld radio to glean the latest news and from that moment, he would never be seen without it. As a child, I recall him listening to the *Arab Voice* news on that battered radio, which had once been blue but now had faded to white with age. Its bulging batteries were duct-taped to the back. Sitting with the radio up to his ear and fighting to hear the reporter amidst the static, Grandpa listened and waited for the announcer to make that long-awaited call: "To the people of Beit Daras: your lands have been liberated, go back to your village." In my life, I only heard my grandpa curse at one reoccurring scenario. His younger son Muneer would make sport of him by running into the room where he would sit and crying out, "Father, they just made the announcement, we can reclaim our land today!" My grandpa would jump from his chair and dash for the radio, but my uncle could not contain his laughter any longer. Knowing that his son had so maliciously fooled him once more, he would point his shaky finger at him and mumble under his breath, "You little bastard," and would return to his chair to wait.

The day he died, his faithful radio was lying on the pillow close to his ear so that even then he might catch the announcement for which he had waited for so long. He wanted to comprehend his dispossession as a simple glitch in the world's consciousness that was sure to be corrected and straightened out in time. He was not mindful of balances of power, regional geopolitics, or other trivial matters. But it is not as if Grandpa was not a keen man, for he certainly was in all worldly matters of relevance to his humble existence. But he decidedly refused to entertain any rationale that would mean the acceptance of an eternal divorce from a past that defined every fiber of his being. For him, accepting that the "good blankets" were gone was the end of hope, the end of faith, the end of life. Grandpa Mohammed was a hopeful man, with strong faith. I loved his company, and his pleasant stories of Beit Daras, its simple folk and much happier times.

BEIT DARAS

Located 46 kilometers to the north-east of Gaza City, Beit Daras was a village that was part of the Gaza Province, and mostly consisted of flat, arable meadows. The Gaza Province extended from the Sinai Peninsula in the south, to the al-Ramleh Province in the north, and from Hebron in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. By the end of the British Mandate in Palestine in 1948, the Gaza Province was comprised of 54 villages and three major towns: Gaza City, al-Majdal and Khan Yunis.[1] It sat 50 meters above sea level, in a central location bordering the towns of al-Majdal and Isdud, and the villages of Hamameh, al-Sawafir and al-Batani.

It was also close to al-Ramleh and Hebron, and a few hours ride by donkey to the major port city of Jaffa, a trip that my grandfather would make many times during his life in Beit Daras. Before the war of 1948, that central location was a blessing to the people of the village. Unlike nearby villages, the residents of Beit Daras didn't seek distant markets to sell their produce and livestock. Two markets, Abu Khadra and Abu Kuffeh, the former specializing in produce and the latter in meat and livestock, were two major attractions that made Beit Daras a required journey for buyers and sellers from near and far.

But something else made Beit Daras different from its neighboring villages. To the east of the village, a British police station was erected soon after the British victory over the Turkish army in 1917, a military drive that began in southern Palestine, through Egypt. The station was hardly there to administer the daily affairs of the village, but rather to ensure the safety of a Jewish colony known as Tabiyya.

Fatima al-Haj Ahmed—known as Um 'Adel—is one of the village's survivors who was made a refugee in the Gaza Strip. There she lives a very difficult life. Eighty years old, Um 'Adel recalls her life in Beit Daras with a fondness that seems to grow with age. Her apolitical narrative transcends time. She told me that the residents of Tabiyya were peaceful, and generous. "They used to come to the market and buy meat and vegetables. Poor things, they knew nothing about agriculture. So we helped them," she told me, so nonchalantly, and as

if nothing has occurred in the intervening years to mar this fond memory.[2] When I asked Um ʻAdel of the language the dwellers of Tabiyya spoke, she gave me a perplexed reply: "What do you mean? What other language would they speak but ours?"

Beit Daras's Jewish neighbors seemed to also excel in the local dialect spoken by the villagers of Beit Daras. But two issues puzzled the people of Beit Daras: the occasional sounds of gunfire coming from behind the colony's fortified walls, and the strong and strange bond that united the British police and the Jewish residents of Tabiyya, despite the fact that no communal violence had ever stained the thus-far neighborly relationship between the people of Beit Daras and those of Tabiyya. In a voice interrupted by an occasional nervous giggle, Um ʻAdel told me:

> Every night a bunch of English officers would come patrolling our streets from the direction of the *kubaniya* [the Jewish colony]. They would ride their horses recklessly in the village. Then we all start running into the alleyways seeking shelter. I used to stay late with my baby boy, visiting a neighbor lady, but once someone would yell: "the English are here," I would take my baby and start running.

But yet again, she would assure me, "that there were a few signs that would alarm us of the future intents of our Tabiyya neighbors. But why should we be scared of them, son?" She would add, "After all, we did so much to help them, and Dr. Tsemeh [a Jewish doctor who lived in Tabiyya] would come and treat our sick whenever we needed his help."[3]

The name Dr. Tsemeh reoccurred in my readings about Beit Daras, and on more than one occasion. Palestinian novelist Abdullah Tayeh—himself from Beit Daras—made mention of the Jewish doctor in his historical novel, *Moon In Beit Daras*. A character in his novel, Abdul Aziz Mahmoud, in total despair flees the village with his family in 1948 following Tabiyya's last successful attack on Beit Daras and the expulsion of its inhabitants; he tells himself:

> What happened? How did things reach this point? Didn't we buy and sell with the people of the *kubaniya*, and exchange seeds and livestock with them? And what about Dr. Tsemeh who has treated the people of the village and nearby villages, and the *tibin* [manure fertilizer] that I once sent him as a thank you gift, and how happy he was that day? Who was interested in destroying everything?[4]

Prior to the successive attacks on Beit Daras in 1948, the village was hardly defined by its relationship to Tabiyya, or by the British presence at the outskirts. The village has been in place since as far back as any of its inhabitants can remember and despite growing suspicions in the 1930s and 1940s, the villagers had little doubt that Beit Daras would remain in place for generations to come. Indeed, invading armies came and went, and none destroyed Beit Daras. It remained a witness to history's violent and peaceful episodes, changes,

progressions, defeats and victories. The place itself, its humble dwellings, might suffer or prosper, reside in anguish, or rejoice in salvation, but it had always remained largely intact as a physical entity, broken and suffering at times, true, but always standing.

Scattered in and about Beit Daras were ruins and monuments that reminded its people of unpredictable times. Beneath the village a one-kilometer-long tunnel ornately decorated with what are believed by some to be the art and script of the Canaanites was a popular destination for play by the children of Beit Daras, including my own father when he was a boy. The Crusaders (1099–1187) had left their mark; a fortified, now vulnerable and crumbling, castle on a hill that was visible from the village. The Mamluks who drove the last Crusaders out of Palestine, and defeated the Mongol hordes under Hulagu in the decisive battle of Ayn Jalut, near Nazareth in 1260, also left their mark: a small inn they erected in the center of the village to serve as a resting spot for those working on the mail route connecting Damascus to Gaza, through Beit Daras.[5] Following the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, Palestine fell under the Turkish reign which ended the Mamluks' rule over Palestine. Initially, the new rulers changed little in the way Palestine was governed under the Mamluks, save the fact that they rearranged the country's provinces in a way that reflected their geopolitical priorities. For one reason or another, Beit Daras in 1596 was designated a village in the Gaza Province.[6] But not long after the advent of the Turks, the rules of the game began changing. Now the villagers were commanded to pay heavy taxes on their crops, livestock and even beehives. The village suffered, like the rest of Palestine, as the Turks expected much and gave little in return, especially as the Ottoman Empire itself began to falter, struggling under the heavy cost of war on many fronts.

World War I created panic in the sickly empire, which for centuries had ruled most of the region of Western Asia: taxes increased at proportions that the poor villagers couldn't match; able men were driven to war fronts that they have never heard of, fighting battles in which they had little interest. In Tayeh's novel, Badr al-Din is a fictional Turkish commander who led a force consisting mostly of poor Palestinian peasants who were coerced to join the Turkish defenses of their falling Palestinian centers in the face of a determined British enemy. Badr al-Din thinks to himself:

> The people are angry at the Turks for neglecting, impoverishing and starving them; for depriving them of all of their possessions. And now we come to force them to fight the British who came to topple our [Ottoman] Caliphate and claim its inheritance. The Turks forced these people to leave their homes, their farms, their villages, their towns, and head south, to the battlefront, to confront the British. The peasants were brought to fight a war that they know nothing of. All they were told was that they must fight until victory or martyrdom. They remained silent fearing retaliation. Villages are constantly raided [by Turkish soldiers] looking for runaway recruits. Many villagers no longer tend their fields, for they cannot afford

> the heavy taxes, and still pay for the seeds. Then they run away, escaping torture and prison. The peasants always ask themselves, "How can the Muslim Turks behave in such ways against their own Muslim brethren? Even the tax collectors, pray when its time for prayer, torture [the peasants] when it's time for torture."[7]

But even those dark periods were now gone, with little evidence to prove that they had ever existed. Um 'Adel's uncle fought in the Turkish army for twelve years, but she knew nothing of his war destinations and he seemed little interested in sharing them with the family. Like many in Beit Daras, and thousands of Palestinians, her uncle hung up his military uniform in his closet, and resumed tending the family's farm when the war was over, as soon as Jerusalem was captured by British forces under the command of General Sir Edmund Allenby in December 1917, and the rest of the country by October 1918.

And now, Beit Daras had to put up with the British and their frightening nightly patrol while at the same time maintain an element of normalcy, as they, and their ancestors, had always done, for centuries. By 1945, Beit Daras had grown in size and population. Its inhabitants numbered 2,750, and its landholding spread to reach 16,357 dunums (a dunum is 1000 square meters, about one-quarter of an acre). While the inhabitants were living in a mere 88 dunums, the rest was land of which they had full ownership, either individually or collectively. Estimates for 1939 state that the village consisted of 401 houses.

Beit Daras had two mosques and a school that had been established in 1921 and hosted, in its first year, 234 students, in six classes, taught by five teachers. The villagers assumed the responsibility of paying the salaries of three of the teachers.[8] Hundreds of villagers were literate, most astute amongst them was Grandpa Mohammed. His knowledge reached far beyond basic writing and reading. He grew to become a learned man of religion and a self-taught scholar.

THE RENEGADE

My grandfather's quest for knowledge—relative to the cultural, economic and educational context of a small Palestinian village equipped with one elementary school in the early twentieth century—may well have been an inborn pursuit, a legacy that many of his descendants would hold onto with distinctive faithfulness. But there was certainly more to his unique inclinations in life, which set him apart from many men of his generation. His mother Qishta died when he was still an infant. Qishta's death, for her, might have been a respite from a miserable marriage to a cruel husband, my paternal great-grandfather, Mahmoud.

Little is known about Mahmoud, save a few scattered facts to be revealed by Grandpa Mohammed over the course of many years. Each revelation would reverberate in the family, that even the grandchildren would take notice that

something new has been learnt of the man of whom we hardly spoke. Indeed, Grandpa wished not speak of his father, but when he did, his eyes would fill with tears at the mere mention of that hurtful past, imposed largely, not by circumstance, but by the careless decisions of Mahmoud. A reckless man, he left his family when Mohammed was only three months old and his older daughter Dalal was ten years old. They were left without mother or father, and Mahmoud settled and married in Hamameh, a small village to the west. This was one of very few bits of information Grandpa would ever reveal.

NAME CHANGE

News of my grandfather's life was not so difficult to extract after the death of his father Mahmoud. In fact, his rise to prominence in Beit Daras was the source of many a pride-filled tale: initially, Dalal and Mohammed didn't carry the Baroud surname. In fact, they had no blood lineage to connect us to the Barouds, one of the largest and most reputable families of Beit Daras. They were members of the much smaller Sa'ad clan. Beit Daras's land, and thus prestige, was divided evenly between the villages' larger clans: Baroud, Maqadima, Abu Shammaleh, Ageel and Abed. The smaller clans—Sa'ad, Tayeh, Hajj Ahmed, and others—owned less land, and enjoyed little or no prestige whatsoever. The larger clans lived in their own neighborhoods, which carried their names, for example, the Baroud neighborhood. The smaller clans were crammed into a modest neighborhood located at the outskirts of Beit Daras, known as the Massriyyen (Egyptian) neighborhood. Massriyyen gained its name from its many residents who were descendants of Egyptian migrant workers or small-time traders, attracted to Beit Daras's central location, rich farms and orchards. Many in the Massriyyen neighborhood would work as laborers on the larger clans' land, for they owned none of their own, or if they did, they were minuscule lots that hardly yielded enough harvest to sustain a family all year. Some of the residents were poor conscripts in the Ottoman army who deserted or were simply left behind, and did not wish to seek their distant birthplaces in Egypt. The family of Mahmoud Sa'ad seemed to be a natural addition to the Massriyyen neighborhood.

Prestige in Beit Daras was acquired through different means. Land, wealth and family ties were the natural measurements of status. Other indications included education, which often simply meant literacy, a particularly special quality if acquired by someone designated as a "man of God." It was a priceless combination to be coveted by the pitiful dwellers of the Massriyyen neighborhood like Mohammed, who spent most of his childhood earning a living as a laborer, and seeking informal, religious education in a nearby mosque. There he learned to read and write, and memorize the Qur'an.

Grandpa Mohammed was hardly satisfied with the course of his life. More was needed to break away from his desolate existence in the Massriyyen neighborhood. He taught himself a craft that was soon to single him out as an exceptional member of that society and reverse his fortunes: he learned the art of basket-weaving, which would allow him to transcend the seemingly

impossible divide between the Massriyyen neighborhood and the rest of Beit Daras. This alone changed everything, including his name. He had no particular affinity to the name Sa'ad. It was the only connection he had to his estranged father. When he became a young man, he gave himself the surname, Qishta, which was his mother's first name. This was rather unorthodox, but he felt that it was one way he could honor his mother.

But basket-weaving meant that the landless laborer was now capable of rising above class and even family identification. He was the only basket-weaver in Beit Daras and its neighboring villages. Now, the literate, pious basket-weaver, also known for his extraordinarily polite disposition, became a welcomed guest in the nightly gatherings in the *diwans*, or meeting places, of the leading families.

Each of Beit Daras's larger clans had a *diwan*, where the men of the village would congregate every evening. They would be hosted at various designated homes by the chosen head of the family, or *mukhtar*. The *mukhtar* was most often elected through a simple voting process, or chosen based on lineage—and the son of the *mukhtar* was often designated to carry on the tradition following the death of his father. The *mukhtar* would also host the men of the family in his house following the sunset prayer to drink bitter Arabic coffee and converse. The aim was to strengthen family unity and resolve quarrels that would ensue over personal differences, or those related to land, inheritance, marriage, or anything else. The *mukhtar* would administer the affairs of each clan and represent them before other clans. The *mukhtar*'s power was a simple extension of the power and prestige of the clan he represented.

The Baroud clan became fond of Mohammed Qishta, formerly known as Sa'ad, not simply out of sympathy, though the family did indeed help Mohammed and his sister after the abandonment of their father. It was largely fondness based on the young man's virtuous characteristics.

A particular story often cited by family members to explain the union between Grandpa and the Barouds is worthy of mention. Despite its simplicity, it is expressive of the straightforward, kind nature of Beit Daras's folk. Grandpa Mohammed was walking in the village when he was met by a young newlywed couple. The bridegroom wanted to demonstrate his physical strength to his young wife, by challenging the apparently shy, indecisive young Mohammed Qishta, to a wrestling match, right then and there.

Grandpa, as the story goes, knew the implications of failing the challenge, and thus hesitantly agreed to the unexpected match. In no time, the brawny, robust husband, who initiated the fight, was tumbling down as Mohammed pinned him, effortlessly, again and again. The humiliated husband was soon to be backed by several young men from his family, who understood that such a defeat—from a lonely man of a small family—would soon spread to reach the whole village and nearby villages. The taunting would certainly exceed that of the no-longer macho husband and taint the whole family. They were set to beat Mohammed, even if that meant a severe punishment from their own *mukhtar* and the censure of the whole village. Just as Mohammed stood his ground, knowing fully the punishment awaiting him, Baroud youths sprung from

everywhere to defend the resilient orphan, spurring even a more humiliating retreat of the attackers. The story of how Grandpa Mohammed prevailed over his assailants was often retold with much exaggeration, reminiscent of a scene in a Bruce Lee movie.

But the idea was not to test Mohammed's physical stamina, as much as to underscore a valuable juncture that continually defined him: his refusal to be dishonored no matter what the price, and his incessant rejection of being classified as a member of a lesser caste, simply because of the unlucky choices of a reckless father. But the story, more or less, served to explain why we became Barouds. Convincing or not, the fact was that Mohammed was now Mohammed Baroud, a regular guest of the *mukhtar* of the Barouds, and was increasingly popular among the villagers and their neighbors. There was also a notable spatial transformation that allowed Mohammed to escape the degradation of the Massriyyen neighborhood into the Baroud neighborhood. The profitable basket business was now prospering, and was already taking Mohammed and his baskets past the world of Beit Daras and its neighboring villages, to Isdud, between Jaffa and Gaza, and eventually to larger and more impressive places: Jaffa, al-Ramleh, Hebron and, in fact, Jerusalem.

Mohammed was not just literate, versed in religion and skillful, but he was also worldly. And indeed, much had taken place beyond the borders of Beit Daras that made Mohammed's stories, following his ambitious and dangerous journeys, of immense interest to the guests of the *mukhtar*'s house. Mohammed was in his thirties, and most curious and concerned, as Palestine in the 1930s was undergoing some of its most defining historic moments. When Mohammed's stories touched on the tumultuous political developments taking place in Jaffa and elsewhere, the mood would shift into a somber one. Laughter would disappear and speculations would take over.

THE DEFINING YEARS

Palestinians were growing restless. What had been perceived as innocent Jewish immigration to Palestine, whether prompted by religious callings or induced by the continued persecution of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe or the pogroms of Russia, had morphed into a multifaceted colonial scheme, with intense diplomacy and feverish military build-up. Much had changed since 1882, when the first wave of Zionist immigrants had arrived to populate, among other communities, the first Zionist colony established five years earlier. Well-informed Palestinians, mostly based in urban centers, were beginning to warn that the Jewish immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not the typical seekers of religious salvation and escapees of oppression. They were part of a Zionist program to conquer Palestine, all of it, and eject its people.

In 1896, Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian Jew, inspired a wider following for the Zionist colonial program with his book *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State). The book not only outlined ideas concerning the founding of a homeland for Jews in Palestine, but it also represented a blueprint for implementing them. A

year later, at Herzl's behest, the First Zionist Congress was convened in Basel, Switzerland, and the World Zionist Organization (WZO) was established. The WZO took on the task of incessant diplomacy and quickly branched out to establish other units, funds and institutions, one of which was the Jewish National Fund. Established in 1901, the London-based fund was entrusted with acquiring Palestinian lands for Jewish-only use, to be tended by Jewish-only labor. Between 1880 and 1914, 30 Zionist colonies were established in Palestine, and the Jewish population there numbered about 80,000, mostly European nationals.[9]

The post-World War I period brought tremendous shifts in international and regional moods and balances of power, changes that would be felt even in the tiny village of Beit Daras in later years. New concepts were also being hastily introduced but with much anticipation among the Arab peoples; one of these was the Wilsonian principal of self-determination.

Many supercilious promises were made to the Arabs during the years of the Great War, as Arab leaders sided with the British in their war against the Ottoman Empire. Arabs were promised immediate independence, including for the Palestinians. Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations was to apply to Arab provinces that had been ruled by the Ottomans. Arabs were told that they were to be respected as "a sacred trust of civilization," and their communities were to be recognized as "independent nations."[10] Palestinians wanted to believe that they too were included in that "sacred trust," and were deserving of independence. In July 1919, their behavior in support of the Pan Arab Congress, as voting delegates, which elected Faisal as a king of a state comprising Palestine, Lebanon, Transjordan and Syria, and their continued support of Sharif Hussein of Mecca, were also an expression of that desire for the long-coveted sovereignty. But there was certainly much room for doubt, that made the fate of the Palestinians less certain than those of other Arab nations. For one, the May 1916 secret treaty, known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, between Britain, France and Russia determined the fate of Palestine as a largely internationalized territory.[11] Worse was the secret letter from British Secretary of State Arthur James Balfour, in November 1917, to leading British Zionist Baron Lionel Walter, which promised Palestine as a national home for the Jews.[12] What was to be the future of the Palestinians, who were increasingly referred to as the "non-Jewish" residents of Palestine?

As the fate of great empires was being sealed, and the fortunes, or misfortunes, of small nations were being determined in secret agreements, Palestinians were growing wary of their political dismissal by Britain and were growing desperate and fearful of the not-so-promising future. In May 1919, US President Woodrow Wilson assigned the King-Crane Commission of Inquiry to report on the aspirations of the inhabitants of Palestine, the vast majority of whom were Palestinian Arabs. They conveyed the growing concern of Palestinians that they are being discounted in their own land, but also revealed the Zionists' intentions of striving to achieve "complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine."[13]

The colonial Zionist designs for Palestine began to trigger riots, ones that were often, if not always, deadly. Palestinians' desperation and anger were all too apparent for even the British to ignore, and grew in its manifestation and scale in proportion to the waves of Zionist immigration to Palestine. Paltry attempts to pacify Palestinian anger were of no avail, especially after the League of Nations Council in July 1922 approved the terms of the British Mandate over Palestine—which was originally granted to Britain in April 1920—without any consultation with the Palestinians, who would disappear from the British and international radar, only to reappear as negligible rioters, troublemakers and obstacles to the joint British-Zionist colonial manipulations. Despite occasional assurances to the contrary, the British intention of ensuring the establishment of an exclusively Jewish state in Palestine was becoming clearer with time. The Balfour Declaration was hardly an aberration, but had indeed set the stage for the full-scale ethnic cleansing that followed three decades later. According to Walid Khalidi:

> The Mandate as a whole was seen by the Palestinians as an Anglo-Zionist condominium and its terms as instrument for the implementation of the Zionist program; it had been imposed on them by force, and they considered it to be both morally and legally invalid. The Palestinians constituted the vast majority of the population and owned the bulk of the land. Inevitably the ensuing struggle centered on this status quo. The British and the Zionists were determined to subvert and revolutionize it, the Palestinians to defend and preserve it.[14]

The dynamics of revolutionizing the status quo on one hand, and defending and preserving it on the other, led to numerous riots that engulfed most urban centers, especially towns that witnessed significant and unremitting Jewish immigration. Palestinian fury was not merely a response to political fears and speculations, but facts on the ground which testified to an alarming reality. Palestinian laborers were losing their livelihoods in droves and peasants were forcefully removed from their land. Palestinians, despite their constant appeals to Britain, had no illusion that the Zionist program was part and parcel of the British agenda at the time. For example, the creation of the Jewish Agency, established in 1929 to represent all Jewish communities world-wide, was stipulated in the terms of the British Mandate. This agency was to play a major role in the war on, and displacement of, Palestinians in the following years. Also in 1929, the relationship between the Jewish and Palestinian communities in Palestine was to be altered permanently, as members of the militant Zionist group, the Zionist Revisionist Party—which advocated the colonization of both Palestine and Transjordan—held an unprovoked rally at the Wailing Wall, near one of Islam's holiest sites, Haram al-Sharif. The rally confirmed the worst fears of Palestinians. Even the "moderates" at the time found it impossible to defend what was becoming an unambiguous Zionist encroachment that would not spare even the most sacred sites in Palestine, as time has proved.

But Palestinians were not to give up that easily. In the early 1930s, their regional and international efforts were now combined with an inward strategy aimed at political organization and awareness campaigns that would engage Palestinians everywhere, even in the smallest of villages. The growth of a collective Palestinian consciousness was met with fierce and intensifying Zionist immigration and military build-up. In 1933, 30,000 Jewish immigrants flocked to Palestine, a number that would reach 42,000 in 1934, and 61,000 in 1935. During these years, five new Palestinian political parties were established. Organized military resistance, however, was registered as beginning in the mid- and late 1920s. The death of Izz al-Din al-Qassam, a local preacher, and a few other fighters at the hands of the British police, in an orchard near Jenin, also in 1935, had truly amplified sympathy towards organized, grassroots armed resistance, and helped expand the debate regarding the course of action to be followed, from major cities to every town and village throughout Palestine. The revolution was now available to the ordinary, from Acre and Safed in the north to Gaza in the south. And Beit Daras was no longer living on the fringes.

Still, the tumultuous succession of events gripping Jerusalem, Haifa and Jaffa, among other major cities, had yet to reach the point of extreme alarm regarding the Jewish residents of the Tabiyya colony, near Beit Daras. Even under these intense national concerns that united Palestinians, including the villagers of Beit Daras, Tabiyya was still peaceful. Its residents were making their daily visits to the village's markets. Dr. Tsemeh's decision to build a new house in Tabiyya ignited the enthusiasm of Beit Daras's youth, who, according to Um 'Adel, did most of the work. Even Grandpa Mohammed had fond memories of Tabiyya, especially of the frequent visits to teach newly acquired friends the art of animal husbandry.

Mohammed, who had little or no land of his own by then, began acquiring small plots near the Baroud clan farms. His fortune turned around as a result of his trade and travels, which involved not only his attractive and popular woven baskets, but also eggs collected daily from Beit Daras's farms, honey, citrus fruits, and more. His profits were increasingly translated into land, one small plot after the other, until the once lonely, penniless Mohammed of a rogue father, was a successful and respected trader, whose growing fortunes of land and a mud-brick house and livestock were unmistakable evidence of wealth and prestige.

Grandpa Mohammed married a young woman named Zeinab. Only 15 years old (half Mohammed's age) when their marriage took place, Zeinab hailed from the al-Maqadima family, one of Beit Daras's largest and most powerful clans. Mohammed was by then, through his newly acquired standing, capable of transcending his humble status of a landless young man with a precarious last name that reflected uncertainty and for long had designated him as a negligible dweller of Massriyyen neighborhood. Zeinab was an orphan herself, raised in the home of an elder female family member, and had, despite her young age, experienced the untold hardship and abuse of peasant life. Mohammed found in Zeinab a faithful, lifelong partner, who stood by his

side with unequaled commitment. Over the years they were to have several children: Ahmad, Mohammed, Idris, Ibrahim, Mariam, Muneer and Farid. My father Mohammed, who carried the name of his father, was the second son. He was born in 1938, with a significant age difference between him and his older brother, Ahmad, of six years or more. Mohammed and Ahmad's relationship was marred with dispute, and for many years, complete estrangement. The events that followed made their perpetual conflict simply inevitable.

2
Born into Turmoil

To determine the precise date of my father's birth is simply not possible. There are no records to which one can resort, no governmental files, no paper trail whatsoever. Alas, it's typical: to be born to a poor farmer in a village that can only be located based on its proximity to a larger town means that one's existence is only pertinent to one's family and to the equally underprivileged dwellers of that obscure village, in this case, Beit Daras. Thus, my father's age could only be estimated, based on deductive reasoning. The fact that he attended the fourth grade in Beit Daras attests to his guess that he was most probably born in 1938. In fact, many years later, he went as far as declaring May 8, 1938 as the exact date of his birth. This was done haphazardly, however, for he had by then succumbed to my older sister's persistent pressure, since without a specific birth date she couldn't throw him a birthday party. Both of my parents, Mohammed and Zarefah, were persuaded to assign such random dates so that two additional celebrations could be designated. My mother, Zarefah, had little choice in the matter, as March 21 was meted out as the day she was supposedly born.

I remember as a boy scrambling along with my sister and brothers for a few shekels to purchase birthday gifts for my parents. Although our presents were most predictable—socks, cheap Egyptian cologne and a new shaving kit for Dad, and a bottle of shampoo, cheap Egyptian perfume and hair ribbons for Mom—they still enjoyed their "surprise" birthday parties and generous gifts immensely. I fondly remember my mother laughing and trying as best as she could to appear surprised: "I have seen this perfume at the market and I have really been hoping to get it … these ribbons are my favorite color … " and so on.

The same similar impasse would arise when trying to identify the birth dates of any member of my family born prior to 1948. Not that the birth dates of expelled Palestinian villagers in the post-war years became of much relevance to those interested in keeping names and records. But the war and expulsion of the villagers of Beit Daras, like the population of hundreds of other villages, turned farmers into refugees, and the refugees were often referred to as a "problem," or at best, a "tragedy," thus "the problem of the refugees" or the "refugees' tragedy." In order for the depth of this disaster to be realized, or its nature to be fittingly appreciated, officials and humanitarian organizations required numbers, names and birth dates. Otherwise, those—purportedly—negotiating the return of the refugees or neighboring countries that were suddenly responsible for settling them, needed to know the extent of the problem or the tragedy which they were confronting. The refugees

who found themselves stranded without homes, food, or clothing needed to certify who they were so that some aid worker in some makeshift aid station in Gaza, Lebanon, or elsewhere would give them a blanket, a scoop of powdered milk, rice and flour. It was then that random birth dates were estimated and assigned. But in Beit Daras, everyone knew everyone else. There was never a need for certification. After the war, such a system of trust espoused in an interconnected society didn't suffice, for the people of Beit Daras were expelled along with nearly one million others. The powerful clans who resided in their own neighborhood and the small families who dwelled in the Massriyyen neighborhood were measly numbers in a sea of people where hardly anyone knew anyone else, where families and loved ones were forever separated, where names, land ownership, prestige and all the rest were scarcely the new priorities as the refugees fought for mere survival.

Although a paper certification of one's birth date or lineage was not a pressing issue, for it was extraneous, confirming one's ownership of land did matter greatly, and everyone seemed to know who owned every inch of Beit Daras's farms. My grandfather had his own *tabu*, or deed. The deed was essential to demarcate one's land through his life and avoid inheritance squabbles afterwards. The system of land ownership was inherited from the Turkish administration, and was mostly honored by the British. Until this day, there are numerous Palestinians who still carry their family *tabu*, designating their lands that have been settled for decades by another people, who were simply handed a share of the land that was forcefully emptied of its indigenous inhabitants.

As for lineage, it was enough for a person from Beit Daras to state the name of his father and grandfather for everyone to know who he was. My father was the son of Mohammed, the son of Mahmoud, the son of Ali, the son of Hasan, the son of Ibrahim, the son of Sa'ad. Older members of the family can claim an even longer and more convoluted lineage, as family trees are often known by heart. In my family's case, the name Baroud, was later added, following Sa'ad. But by the time my father was born, the aberrant memories of his grandfather were all but forgotten. For my grandfather's hard work and honesty managed to distract from the painful past, which eventually dwindled to become an unpleasant yet distant memory.

Mohammed, the son, was born into a family that would have been regarded with pride, not disgrace. Despite this, Mohammed the son was in some way ill-fated, for he was not the first-born. Ahmad was. Under ordinary circumstances, such birth order would have not mattered a great deal, but neither the father nor the mother were products of normal circumstances. Grandpa Mohammed was the only male in his family, and an "orphan" at that. Grandma Zeinab was anxious to demonstrate her fertility and her ability to give birth to boys, as if she had some sway over the matter. Then, in a year that must've been in the early 1930s, Ahmad was born. Once again, Grandpa Mohammed was referred to after the name of his eldest son, as traditions compelled. He was now Abu Ahmad, or the father of Ahmad. The

once-destitute, negligible Zeinab, who had married a respectable man, thus raising her social standing significantly, became Um Ahmad, the mother of Ahmad. For both, Ahmad represented an unequaled endowment from the deity, an honor that both would bask in for many years. Ahmad's advent was a sign that all was well, and that the misfortunes of the past were already being reversed.

In Beit Daras's patriarchal society, boys were valued more than girls based on clear-cut logic: boys could work the land, and were socially responsible for the welfare of their elders; girls would marry at a young age and become responsible for the elders of their husbands' families. But Grandpa Mohammed dared to alter that calculation. His frequent visits to larger towns, especially the port city of Jaffa, raised his expectations of himself and eventually his children. He met and interacted with thriving Palestinian communities outside Beit Daras. He learned that education could in fact go beyond elementary schooling, as some of his countrymen traveled as far as Damascus, Cairo and even Istanbul to earn higher degrees, returning home as doctors, lawyers, judges, or teachers. Grandpa Mohammed yearned once more to break away from the confines and expectations of life in Beit Daras, and made what must have seemed an eccentric move at the time. He decided that Ahmad was not meant to work the land as tradition obliged, but to receive the best education that Beit Daras, Isdud, al-Majdal and, if necessary, Jaffa had to offer. Much attention was paid to Ahmad, to the point that at a very young age, the exceptional pupil at Beit Daras elementary school was dressed in clothing tailored in the city, including the Turkish *tarboosh* or *fez*, like the educated elites of the city. He was being geared up to fit a role that was already designated for him: that of a teacher, not a farmer. When Mohammed, the second son, arrived a few years later, God was properly thanked for his blessings. But so many efforts and subsequent expectations were pinned on Ahmad, that Mohammed's role was deemed secondary even before his birth. He was special, but certainly not equally special. He was to be celebrated, but in a different way than the ongoing celebration accompanying his older brother's every move and achievement. Ahmad might have also feared that the arrival of the newborn would distract his parents'—until this point—uninterrupted love affair with him. The new baby was to be derided, neglected, and later on, severely abused.

The arrival of Mohammed had indeed constituted a dilemma that was never to be resolved: parents who failed to appreciate Mohammed as a being independent from the order in which he was born, and an intensely jealous older brother who had grown accustomed to—and now demanded—uncontested attention.

REBELLION

But family dynamics hardly distracted from the far-reaching politics that engulfed the whole country and spurred fear and ire in villages just like Beit Daras, igniting a nationalistic sentiment that was unprecedented, if not

entirely alien, to the people of Beit Daras and much of Palestine. Just two years prior to the assumed birth year of my father, Palestine experienced its first open rebellion against the Zionist colonial drive in the country, and the complacent British role in espousing it and laboring to ensure its success. In April 1936, all five Palestinian political parties united under the umbrella of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), led by Haj Amin al-Husseini.[1] One of the AHC's first decisions was the hurried assembly of National Committees throughout Palestine. In May, al-Husseini summoned the first conference of the National Committees in Jerusalem, which collectively declared a general strike on May 8, 1936. The first joint Palestinian action to protest the Zionist-British designs in Palestine was non-violent. Employing means of civil disobedience—as exemplified in its cry of "No Taxation without Representation"—the 1936 uprising aimed to send a stern message to the British government that Palestinians were nationally unified and capable of acting as an assertive, self-assured society in ways that could indeed disturb the matrix of the British mandate over the country. The British administration in Palestine had thus far discounted the Palestinian demand for independence and paid little attention to their incessant complaints about the rising menace of Zionism and its colonial project.

But Palestinian fury was soon to turn violent as the British government resorted to mass repression. It too wanted to send a message to Palestinians that His Majesty's Government would not be intimidated, surely not by hordes of what the British saw as insignificant *fellahin*, or peasants. The first six months of the uprising, which lasted under different manifestations and phases for three years, was characterized at the outset by a widely observed general strike which lasted from May until October 1936. Palestine was simply shut down in response to the call of the National Committees and al-Husseini, a type of action that irked the British who saw the "non-Jewish residents of Palestine" as deplorable, troublesome peasants with an untamed leadership that was, unlike the Jewish leadership, incapable of articulating a national program, and most certainly incompetent of acting upon one, if such a program were ever devised. Within a few years, Palestinians managed to challenge the conventional wisdom of the British, whose narrow Orientalist grasp on the Arabs as lesser beings with lesser or no rights—a model to be borrowed and amply applied by the Zionists, and Israeli official policies later on—left them unqualified to ponder any other response to a legitimate uprising but coercive measures:

> Neither the Balfour Declaration nor the mandate ever specifically conceded that Palestinians had political, as opposed to civil and religious, rights in Palestine. The idea of inequality between Jews and Arabs was therefore built into British, and subsequently Israeli and United States, policy from the start.[2]

Palestinians in the countryside, in villages that also included Beit Daras, were the first to carry arms and engage British forces and Zionist militants. They

were disorganized and desperate, but determined to fight the oppressive nature of the colonial project underway in Palestine, the increasing orders of land evictions, the loss of land, livelihoods, and even worse, honor. Zionist militias were actively formulated, organized and efficiently armed, but mass repression of the Palestinian struggle was until then largely carried out by the British army. Near Beit Daras, the residents of Tabiyya kept within the walls of their colony, and British police increased their patrols and nightly raids, searching the humble dwellings of Beit Daras for firearms or anything that would resemble a weapon. In nearby Jaffa, additional British enforcements demolished large parts of the Old City of Jaffa. In the rest of the country, British forces clashed with villagers who fought using primitive means. Yet another delegation, the Peel Commission, was deployed to Palestine to examine the roots of the violence, as if the British government was still unable to decipher the causes of anger that unified nearly a million Palestinians, the total population of Palestinian Arabs, Christians and Muslims, at the time. Under severe pressure from Arab states, al-Husseini called off the general strike to allow the commission to tour the country and to submit its recommendations to the British government. In July 1937, once it became clear that the British were little interested in addressing Palestinian grievances, Palestinian disappointment turned into all-out fury. The violence was truly unprecedented.

The second phase of the rebellion lasted from July 1937 until the fall of 1938. What triggered the new escalation of violence was the publication in July 1937 of the Peel Commission's report, which unhesitatingly declared the two "underlying causes of the disturbances": the desire of the Palestinians for independence, and their "hatred and fear of the establishment of the Jewish national home." The report then proceeded to recommend the partition of the country into a Jewish state, a Palestinian state to be incorporated by Transjordan, and enclaves reserved for the Mandate.[3]

It became evident to the Palestinians that the commission's recommendations were aimed at legitimizing what henceforth became the official policy of Britain. In the eyes of Palestinians, dividing Palestine was an unparalleled injustice. Not only did it undercut the system of the mandate, which was meant to guide Palestinians, like other Arab nations, to self-government, but while it clearly sought full and meaningful independence for Jewish immigrants, it conditioned any Palestinian "independence" as being part of Transjordan, which was itself a British invention that hardly enjoyed true sovereignty to begin with. More, the report must have terrified Palestinians, for it effectively sought to grant 33 percent of the total area of Palestine to a Zionist government, whereas at that time total Jewish ownership didn't exceed 5.6 percent of the country.[4] The Jewish state, the report counseled, was to include the most strategic and fertile regions of Palestine, including the fertile Galilee, much of the water access to the Mediterranean, and the cities of Haifa and Acre. The commission went so far as to recommend forcible transfers of those who refused to leave the Jewish state:[5]

> Considering the attitude which both the Arab and the Jewish representatives adopted in giving evidence, the Commission thinks it improbable that either party will be satisfied at first sight with the proposals submitted for the adjustment of their rival claims. For Partition means that neither will get all it wants. It means that the Arabs must acquiesce in the exclusion from their sovereignty of a piece of territory, long occupied and once ruled by them. It means that the Jews must be content with less than the Land of Israel they once ruled and have hoped to rule again. But it seems possible that on reflection both parties will come to realize that the drawbacks of Partition are outweighed by its advantages. For, if it offers neither party all it wants, it offers each what it wants most, namely freedom and security.[6]

The report's ostentatious "findings" likened the Palestinian claim over their land, on which they have dwelled for many generations to the Zionists' claims of antiquity. While the British authorities behaved as if the Peel Commission acted independently and irrespective of the government's political outlook, there was little doubt among Palestinians that the report's recommendations were designed precisely to further an already existing and ever faithful agenda whose ultimate aim was the establishment of a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine at any cost.

The British reaction to the intensification of the Palestinian rebellion was exacted in three coherent and interrelated policies. First, the British cracked down on the Palestinian political leadership, as it swiftly outlawed the Arab High Committee, and exiled its top leadership to the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean.[7] Secondly, it heightened the level of violence against the Palestinian population. This included heavy air bombardment and artillery shelling which targeted Palestinian localities that took part in the resistance or civil disobedience. Mass arrests took place as thousands of Palestinians, from all backgrounds, were herded into "detention centers" to live under particularly atrocious conditions. Death sentences were rashly and harshly handed down by military tribunals. Meanwhile, as the rebellion grew, the Palestinian death toll continued to climb. In 1938 alone, over a thousand Palestinians were killed.[8] Thirdly, as British authorities actively labored to quell the Palestinian revolt, it doubled its efforts in backing the Zionist military build-up. Along with the Haganah, the secret army of the Jewish Agency, the British helped establish, organize and arm the Jewish Settlement Police (JSP). Considering the already existing military readiness in various colonies and among the Haganah units, the JSP numbered 14,000 by early 1938.[9] The Special Night Squad, a mixed British-Zionist force, was another military unit whose sole purpose was to conduct "special operations" against Palestinian villages.

In November 1938, another commission was dispatched. But the Woodhead Commission seemed to signal a rethink in the British government regarding Partition. Nonetheless, the growing militant response to the Palestinian revolt was not about to change. The number of Palestinian causalities continued to swell. Twelve hundred Palestinian lives were claimed in the British onslaught, including 55 who were executed by hanging. Detention centers also grew and

draconian measures continued unabated. The civilian British government was almost entirely scrapped in favor of a military command run by war generals. The all-out war targeted all Palestinians. Nationalistic sentiment, which had grown in the 1920s and 1930s out of implicit national consensus that the Zionist project required a collective retort and action, matured, thanks to the sacrifices and the blood of thousands who fell between 1936 and 1939. A new Palestinian identity was being formulated. Palestinians were no longer united just by geography and common history, but also by a common enemy and a common fate.

NEW POLICY

In May 1939, the British government published a White Paper, which outlined a new policy that represented an unmistakable shift, or the beginning of the end of the British-Zionist official amalgamation. That shift was to be censured by Zionist leaders as unfair, and a great injustice. Still, Palestinians were unimpressed. From the White Paper:

> His Majesty's Government adhere to this interpretation of the [Balfour] Declaration of 1917 and regard it as an authoritative and comprehensive description of the character of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. It envisaged the further development of the existing Jewish community with the assistance of Jews in other parts of the world. Evidence that His Majesty's Government have been carrying out their obligation in this respect is to be found in the facts that, since the statement of 1922 was published, more than 300,000 Jews have immigrated to Palestine, and that the population of the National Home has risen to some 450,000, or approaching a third of the entire population of the country. Nor has the Jewish community failed to take full advantage of the opportunities given to it. The growth of the Jewish National Home and its achievements in many fields are a remarkable constructive effort which must command the admiration of the world and must be, in particular, a source of pride to the Jewish people … In the view of the Royal Commission the association of the policy of the Balfour Declaration with the Mandate system implied the belief that Arab hostility to the former would sooner or later be overcome. It has been the hope of British Governments ever since the Balfour Declaration was issued that in time the Arab population, recognizing the advantages to be derived from Jewish settlement and development in Palestine, would become reconciled to the further growth of the Jewish National Home. This hope has not been fulfilled. The alternatives before His Majesty's Government are either (i) to seek to expand the Jewish National Home indefinitely by immigration, against the strongly expressed will of the Arab people of the country; or (ii) to permit further expansion of the Jewish National Home by immigration only if the Arabs are prepared to acquiesce in it. The former policy means rule by force … His Majesty's Government, after earnest consideration, and taking into account the extent to which the growth of the Jewish National

> Home has been facilitated over the last twenty years, have decided that the time has come to adopt in principle the second of the alternatives referred to above … Jewish immigration during the next five years will be at a rate which, if economic absorptive capacity permits, will bring the Jewish population up to approximately one third of the total population of the country. Taking into account the expected natural increase of the Arab and Jewish populations, and the number of illegal Jewish immigrants now in the country, this would allow of the admission, as from the beginning of April this year, of some 75,000 immigrants over the next five years.[10]

To limit Jewish immigration to Palestine was perceived by Zionists leaders as a most underhanded betrayal. The British were perceived as finally succumbing to Arab pressure, and within days of the publication of the new policy statement, many Zionists declared war on the British.

The underpinnings of the new British policy, governed as it were by larger policy considerations, remained committed to the same kind of aggravated arrogance that defined its attitude towards Palestinians and remained pointedly committed to Zionists and Zionism. Nonetheless, Palestinian Arabs, their concerns and grievances were wholly discounted. The language of the above text, as patronizing as it were, signaled a shift from the language of merely three decades earlier in the Balfour Declaration:

> For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country … The four great powers are committed to Zionism, and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes of far profounder import than the desire and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land. In my opinion that is right.[11]

Keeping in mind the ultimate objectives of Zionism, the shift in language was just as alarming to Zionists at the time, as the shift in policy. Leading Zionists would never accept anything but total and complete independence that was very much based on the ever-recurring theme of "the land without the people." This extremist view was articulated by Joseph Weitz who from 1932 served as the director of the Jewish National Land Fund. On December 19, 1940, he wrote a letter, the text of which was published in 1965 in his volume, *My Diary, and Letters to the Children*:

> It must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country. No "development" will bring us closer to our aim, to be an independent people in this small country. If the Arabs leave the country, it will be broad and wide-open for us. And if the Arabs stay, the country will remain narrow and miserable. When the War is over and the English have won, and when the judges sit on the throne of Law, our people must bring their petitions and their claim before them; and the only solution is Eretz Israel, or at

> least Western Eretz Israel, without Arabs. There is no compromise on this point.[12]

Weitz's views represented those of the moderates amongst Zionists, for a substantial segment of the now highly militarized movement didn't see the British as the judges sitting on the "throne of Law," but rather as a full-fledged enemy that had to be fought, and forced to hasten what later was seen as an imminent withdrawal, so that the dawn of Eretz Israel, or "at least Western Eretz Israel" could be realized. Indeed, apart from mainstream Zionists and their military arm, the Haganah, more militant offshoots were on the rise. In the late 1930s, the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization) was carrying out all sorts of terrorists attacks against civilians. The Irgun served as the military branch of the right-wing Zionist Revisionist Movement Party.[13] While full British involvement in World War II had obliged Weitz and many Zionists to choose the British side and wait to contest the White Paper until a later date, another Zionist militia, the Stern Gang, began actively targeting British interests in Palestine. Still, however, 27,000 Jews from Palestine joined the British army and the Zionists' military preparedness experienced a vast and rapid expansion to meet the war's needs. As if the adjoined military presence of the British and Zionists in Palestine was not alarming enough, the war had made the union much more obvious, and it proved in later years, to be of immense benefit to the decisive Zionist takeover of Palestine. The split in the Zionist psyche at the time was best and famously expressed by Ben-Gurion himself, who too declared a war on the British: "We will fight the war as if there were no White Paper, and we will fight the White Paper as if there were no war."[14]

It's nearly impossible to corroborate how such happenings were perceived in Beit Daras. One may argue that the people in Beit Daras learned little of such specifics in the first place, for information was mostly available through travelers to the larger towns, where the well-educated Palestinian class seemed to fathom and duly respond to consequential political events. But even then, travelers to distant markets and city centers, whether in Jaffa, Hebron, or elsewhere, conveyed general sentiments, news of rebellions, strikes and mass arrests, British repressions, Zionist terrorism, Arab violence, which was often followed by hasty trials and executions. The people in Beit Daras would respond accordingly. The White Paper, for example, must have conveyed a general feeling of hope, but never full trust in the British, with their unwelcome presence near Beit Daras, the frequent patrols, the violent nightly raids, and their derisory view of the *fellahin*. How could there be any possibility of trust or affection of any sort?

Though also difficult to verify, but could be fairly reckoned, is that Grandpa Mohammed's travels, their frequency, direction, and outreach, were largely determined by the overall security situation at the time. The years of rebellion must have been particularly bad for business. The World War II years must have improved the situation, for the British were now busy with their global war, the Zionists were speedily arming themselves and the Palestinian

leadership was largely quiescent, at least during the period of 1939–45. There was certainly an economic boom linked to the increased spending by the British army in Palestine. But two main reasons were upheld as key in the Palestinian quiescence at the time: "Their passivity was due partly to the brutality and thoroughness of the British repression of the rebellion, and partly to the relatively reassuring provisions of the 1939 White Paper on Zionist immigration and land acquisitions."[15]

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

My father's childhood in Beit Daras during this phase was rarely influenced by either the specific nor the collective and general political events, uprisings, wars or upheavals of any sort. His memories of Beit Daras, until his family was expelled, were largely pleasant. His father's house was relatively prosperous. He spoke of his father's constant travels and adventures, his mother's strong qualities and assertive personality. He was still too young to hold grudges or to understand family politics, at least enough to taint what remained pleasant and wholesome memories of a contented village, whose celebrations by far surpassed its sorrow. He told of the innocent culpability of a child, of how he occasionally skipped school to go bird hunting, or endlessly swim in the many ponds that strayed from the river which passed through Beit Daras. He spoke about how he proudly identified with his older brother, the brilliant young student with the new suit and *tarboosh*, who, although still a boy, became a teacher in the village's elementary school. Ahmad was studious enough to make such a quick transition, but most importantly he had the look to pull it off. My father repeatedly told my brothers and me of how Grandpa Mohammed fought off a hungry hyena on a late-night return from Jaffa to Beit Daras. A small box of matches apparently saved the day, as hyenas are quite scared of fire: "Your grandpa kept lighting one match at a time, enough to scare the hyena for a moment. But it kept coming back. Your grandfather's last match served him until he reached the outskirts of the village. Only then he yelled for help, and scores of men came running to his aid." Grandpa would listen to the repeated story and nod with pride and affirmation of its authenticity.

Grandma Zeinab also had her share of adventures. Her defining moment was when she single-handedly killed a snake when it crept into the family storage room, where cheese, eggs, flour and all sorts of crops were stored. For some reason, the story was not told as often. Was it because Grandma was the only witness to the heroic event? It is hard to tell. Nonetheless, the story was recorded in the annals of family tradition, and each time the legend was relayed, the snake morphed in size and ferocity.

My father, although jokingly, would often blame his mother for his misfortune of never visiting Jaffa with his father during his childhood in Beit Daras. He asked her to wake him up early enough to join his father on his trip to Jaffa. Every morning, he would wake up late and run to his mother demanding to know why she left him sleeping, as his special Jaffa clothes and

snacks were all ready for the coveted journey. "I did, but every time I tried to wake you up you kicked me so hard I fell on my back."

The truth was revealed many years later, when Grandma Zeinab admitted that she had never tried to wake him up. Initially, he was genuinely upset, not for missing such a desirable journey, and the indulgences of the big city, but because of the protracted shame he felt for years at the thought of kicking his own mother. Later, the story became another recurring anecdote, specially invoked to ease the tense air following my father's regular and angry exchanges with his mother, whom he blamed for much of his misfortunes, which dated from the moment the family was expelled from their beloved village and Beit Daras was destroyed. But despite of my father's unclouded childhood memories, and the anticipation and relative calm that was felt throughout Palestine at the time, the war years were vital in shaping the history that followed in Palestine and a most tragic fate that awaited Beit Daras, my father and his family.

END OF AN ERA

Although wary of the danger of a complete breakup with the British, the Zionists were beginning to lobby for a greater US and American-Jewish role in Palestine. In May 1942, David Ben-Gurion, then the representative of the Jewish Agency, attended a conference in New York which brought together leading American Zionists; here, he demanded that all of Palestine become a "Jewish Commonwealth."[16] It was becoming clear that neither the White Paper, nor any British policy would restrain the ravenous Zionist territorial intentions in Palestine. Meanwhile, the supposedly renegade Irgun and Stern Gang were expanding their terror campaign against the British. As the British were losing their grip on power in Palestine, as in other colonies, the Zionists were moving from strength to strength, with the United States emerging as the new benefactor:

> The Zionist campaign against the British was waged on three levels: the diplomatic, the military, and the propagandistic. On the diplomatic level, the Zionists found a powerful ally in President Harry Truman soon after his inauguration. Pressuring London first on the immigration issue, Truman repeatedly (in August 1945, June 1946, July 1946 and October 1946) called for the immediate unconditional admission into Palestine of 100,000 Jewish immigrants, thus altogether undermining the 1939 White Paper. Truman went a step further in his support of Zionism by endorsing a Jewish Agency plan for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and a Palestinian state. The plan envisaged the incorporation into the Jewish state of some 60 per cent of Palestine at a time when the Jewish landownership in the country didn't exceed 7 per cent.[17]

The British military response was considerably meek compared to the brutal repression that had followed Palestinian revolts. While the British continued

to hold thousands of Palestinians in detention centers—despite the fact that thousands of Palestinian volunteers had fought alongside British soldiers in the war—members of the Jewish Agency arrested in June 29, 1946 for their overall role in the violence, were released on November 5 of the same year.[18] The devastation wrought by the war, however, took its toll on the British government in Palestine, which neither had the means nor the desire to carry on with its strategic policy aimed at maintaining the once commanding, but now floundering empire.

On October 29, 1947, Britain declared its intentions to pull out from Palestine within six months, if a settlement between Palestinians and the Zionist leadership was not reached. But by then, the balances of power had changed; the US, an aspiring empire, was now on the move on behalf of those advocating a Jewish state, and the power of the Zionists had reached its highest levels of military preparedness, political readiness and administrative efficiency:

> In a sharp contrast to Zionist strategy, there was total absence of the Arab side of any military preparedness or planning. The first time the Arab League seriously faced this question was in September 1947, although even then the measures decided were altogether inadequate. Arab inattention to the military dimension resulted largely from a misplaced belief that Britain would not abdicate its responsibilities as the Mandatory.[19]

My father was only nine years old when the Zionist military campaign to take over Palestine rolled into action. No one in his village, not even his wise and learned father, was to foresee the atrocities that followed: the uneven war, the dispossession, the massacres, the betrayal, and the lifelong suffering. What my father found particularly unfair was that although he and other village children would pay such a heavy price, they hardly understood why their lives would be forever altered.

3
Taking Flight

Tabiyya was hardly just another village bordering Beit Daras that happened by sheer demographic coincidence to be populated solely by Jewish residents; it was also strategically positioned in southern Palestine as a gateway to Hebron, and subsequently to the Negev. The role that Tabiyya played in the war was so significant that it was regarded as the Zionist stronghold that eventually drove the Egyptian army out of Negev in the concluding stages of war.[1] It follows that Beit Daras too became of immense importance to the Zionists, to Palestinian fighters and to the Egyptian army, as was later demonstrated. The attempt to eradicate any possibility of resistance in Beit Daras was an early and central priority for the Zionist leadership. But even before the Egyptian army or any other Arab armies became involved in the war—and a belated involvement at that—the fighters in Beit Daras had put up a tough fight in successive battles that further contributed to their reputation of strength and prowess.

BIT ET TABIYYA

Palestinian sources tell little of Tabiyya, known formally as Bit et Tabiyya, aside from the fact that it was a Zionist colony that played a vital role in the 1947–48 war. Those from Beit Daras who can recall the pre-war years spoke of Tabiyya as more or less a friendly area with which Beit Daras had peaceful relations. The village, or colony, of Tabiyya as it were, was briefly, if not rashly mentioned as an anecdote of betrayal, where the residents of Tabiyya turned against the very Beit Daras villagers who had taught them so much, amongst them the art of husbandry, without which Tabiyya would have not survived for long. But the fact is Tabiyya was never intended to be just another enclave among scores of Palestinian villages in southern Palestine. It was a part and parcel of a Zionist strategy that preceded the turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century, and indeed the official inception of the Zionist movement in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Founded in 1887, Tabiyya is linked to the earliest years of Zionist settlement in Palestine.[2]

Zionist sources say that the colony was established on land that was purchased by Baron de Rothschild.[3] But little is said of the strategic rationale behind that purchase. As far as Beit Daras villagers were concerned, Tabiyya was on land that belonged to various villages, but mostly Beit Daras and Qastina. In fact, Tabiyya was first named after Qastina. The new Qastina was soon abandoned, due to "Arab harassment and scarcity of water."[4] In 1896, it was populated again and renamed Be'er Toviyya, only to be abandoned yet

again in 1929, following Palestinian riots and Palestinian-Jewish clashes. A year later, it was populated for the third time, and with successive expansions that managed to claim 15,000 dunums of land, acquired almost entirely from areas that belonged to Beit Daras. In 1947, Tabiyya's population was estimated at 642. While its size was significant enough from the viewpoint of relatively small villages like Beit Daras and Qastina, especially as the expansion of the village took place at the expense of Palestinian land, in the great scheme of things, neither the size of Tabiyya nor its population seemed so significant as to explain the doggedness of the Zionist leadership to risk the safety of its inhabitants by populating such a small piece of land three times in the course of 60 years. Is it possible that early Zionists had already envisioned a role for Tabiyya and persisted in maintaining that role for so long, until it was finally realized, with implausible success during Israel's "War of Independence"?

Equally puzzling was the existence of a British army supply camp at the border of Tabiyya and Beit Daras. Innocently, the residents of Beit Daras referred to it as a "police station." But the camp certainly was much more than that, and again, had served Tabiyya and later Zionist army units in ways that guaranteed their dominance, and eventually victory over the Arab inhabitants of that area. My father had jokingly referred to the British presence near his village, as he and Beit Daras boys would follow the soldiers on their daily patrols: "The British occupied our village for decades, and all they taught us was 'fuck you' and 'zig zig.'" I still haven't a clue what "zig zig" means, but I am almost certain that the former term was used abundantly to chase away troublesome village boys, or to humiliate villagers during nightly raids. It was funny every time he said it, but in some strange way it seemed analogous to the type of relationship that the British had with Beit Daras's residents.

Indeed, Tabiyya was not an ordinary "village" or even an ordinary colony, for it also bordered on an airport that was operated by the British but was frequently used to smuggle arms to the Haganah.[5] Without reliable airborne and safe supply routes, the Haganah's fight to conquer southern Palestine would have proven much more difficult. When the Zionists began attacking Beit Daras, they fully comprehended the strategic significance of destroying the village and driving out its inhabitants. When the villagers fought back, they simply did so to defend their families, their honor and their land. It was only when the Egyptian army intervened to regain the village after its final demise, that they began to appreciate the value of Beit Daras in terms of Zionist war plans. But by then, it was too late.

But in other ways, Tabiyya was just another colony. It was part and parcel of strategic Zionist positioning of Jewish colonies in rural areas, mostly as outposts to guard supply routes, as gateways to more important, and larger colonies, and as part of its later revealed plans aimed at the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the countryside. Israeli historian Ilan Pappe explains:

> Most of the Zionist settler colonies in the rural areas lay far apart from each other; in some areas, such as the Galilee in the north and the Naqab [the Negev] in the south, they were effectively isolated islands amidst the

> surrounding Palestinian countryside. This isolation meant these colonies were built like military garrisons rather than villages: what inspired their layout and design were security considerations rather than human habitation. Their introverted seclusion contrasted bizarrely with the open spaces of the traditional Palestinian villages with their natural stone houses and their accessible, unhindered approaches to the nearby fields and the orchards and olive groves around them. That so few Jews had settled in the Palestinian countryside proved to be a serious problem for those who wanted to base their solution to the growing conflict between the two communities on the principle of partition.[6]

But were Tabiyya and the numerous other Zionist colonies in the Palestine countryside an aberration, inconsistent with a mainstream Zionist agenda that favored Partition?

PARTITION

When early British plans suggested the partition of Palestine, Zionists celebrated, but hardly ceased to contend that Palestine, all of Palestine, was theirs. The logic behind the celebration was the generous offerings that these plans had made to the Zionists in ways that are grossly disproportionate to their population. When the British absolved themselves from the conflict in Palestine, and relegated the issue to the United Nations, the reality on the ground was greatly altered, thanks in part to British policy that had for many years supported mass Jewish immigration to Palestine. By the end of 1947, as the UN was assuming a greater role in Palestine—although largely manipulated by the United States and Britain—the indigenous Palestinian Arab majority was estimated at two thirds of Palestine's total population. The rest were Jewish newcomers. At the start of the Mandate, 90 percent of the population was Palestinian Arab.[7] The British role in the ethnic cleansing that followed can hardly be contested. However, the land was still mostly Palestinian. All the shady purchases that took place during and even prior to the Mandate years, all the unwarranted confiscations for "military purposes," all the land that was seized illegally, hardly altered the land division. Maybe the population had become "mixed" due to the pro-Zionist policies of Britain, but land ownership was hardly mixed at all. In fact, "almost all of the cultivated land in Palestine was held by the indigenous population [while] only 5.8 percent was in Jewish ownership in 1947."[8]

The numbers cited above however seemed to matter to no one, save the Palestinians. The United Nations General Assembly—under intense pressure from the US government and President Truman himself—voted in favor of Resolution 181, which recommended the partition of Palestine into three entities: a Jewish state, a Palestinian state and an international regime to govern Jerusalem. If the British proposal of 1937 was angering enough for the Arabs, the UN resolution was a reason for total dismay, as it allocated 5500 square miles to the proposed Jewish state, and only 4500 square miles

to Palestinians—who owned 94.2 percent of the land and represented two-thirds of the population.[9] The fact that only 600 square miles of the proposed Jewish state was actually owned by Jews seemed not to irk the 33 member states who voted in favor of partition. Once again, the Zionist leadership was jubilant, knowing fully that the partition resolution was originally a Zionist plan that the US president had endorsed as early as 1946.[10] Once again, Zionist celebrations and Arab dismay, each reacting to the same skewed logic that provided an alien party the right to rob someone of their land and hand it over to another. The Zionist leadership was hardly content with the UN's iniquitous division, but it was a milestone worthy of festivities, for it was now the international community, led, or coerced, by the United States that was championing the Zionist vision, and had reached a point of generosity that was truly unexpected. Palestinians and Arabs on the other hand, who had hoped that the US with its constant emphasis on self-determination would shift the slanted British policy in favor of those Arabs who had long been denied self-determination on their own land, were experiencing yet another rude awakening as the tilted policies of Britain were now adopted, with a new impetus by the Americans. Any little chance for sanity seemed to have vanished.

The inhabitants of Beit Daras were particularity distressed, as their village was of the many unfortunate villages and towns that fell overnight, due to some political considerations, from being historically a Palestinian Arab village, into a village that belonged to a Palestinian minority in a proposed Jewish state. Grandpa Mohammed's world must have felt so limited when he learned that, according to the new arrangement, he would no longer be able to travel to Hebron, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Ramleh, or Lydda, as his village was now trapped in the environs of a Jewish state in which, he, a native Palestinian, was a minority.

NEW REALITIES

By the end of World War II, and the increasing dominance of the United States over world affairs, including the Middle East, new terminologies were now entering the Palestinian-Arab lexicon. The intense debate over the Zionists, the Jewish immigration, the British bias, and so on, were joined by new alien topics about the Holocaust and Hitler, and how such more recent happenings were cementing the Zionist claim over Palestine. While Arab ambassadors at the UN were decrying the injustice of having Palestinians redeem the sins of Europe, the villagers of Beit Daras were scantily aware of the new circumstances that would seal their fate. Grandpa Mohammed, savvy regarding issues relevant to his time and surroundings, was not aware of who Hitler was and how this man with a funny mustache would deeply influence the future of Beit Daras and its very existence. And as Arab delegates at the UN appealed to the International Court of Justice to deny the UN the right to carry out the recommendations made in Resolution 181 to no avail, Beit Daras was preparing to defend its land no matter what international

institutions resolved and dictated. Grandpa Mohammed was not the least prepared to give away the land he bought, complete with a deed and a seal, and which had been in the hands of villagers of Beit Daras for as long as anyone could remember; his memories, his love and loss, his struggles were all he needed to prove that Beit Daras was his. And Grandpa Mohammed was hardly the exception.

As Palestinians were reaching the imminent conclusion of an approaching war, thus the need to prepare militarily, the Zionist leadership was finalizing a plan that dated back to May 1942 to take over the whole of Palestine. The main Zionist fighting force was the Haganah, under the command of the Jewish Agency; the latter already functioned as a government, while the former was an army. But the Haganah's history is much more convoluted, for it had "evolved in the early days of the Mandate as an offshoot of the pre-Mandatory Hashomer (Watchman), itself descended from the secret societies of Czarist Russia. In 1947 the Haganah had a continuous existence of at least 30 years."[11] Meanwhile, the Anglo-American Committee estimated Zionist military preparedness in a 1946 report at 62,000 well-trained fighters. There was no mention of Palestinian readiness whatsoever.[12] A Haganah memorandum sent to the Anglo-American Committee on March 25, 1946 read:

> As far as the strength of the Arabs in Palestine is concerned, we are in possession of well-founded information. There is no doubt that the Jewish force is superior in organization, training, planning and equipment, and that we ourselves will be able to handle any attack or rebellion from the Arab side without calling for any assistance from the British or the Americans. If you accept the Zionist solution but are unable or unwilling to enforce it, please don't interfere, and we ourselves will secure its implementation.[13]

Considering that Resolution 181 was originally a Zionist plan that gained the US government's vote of confidence, and eventually the United Nations', the Zionist leadership was well prepared for all possibilities that could result from partition. In the May 1946 plan, the Haganah developed a military concept of "counteraction" which adopted two military tactics: "warning" and "punitive," both aimed at "inflict[ing] physical harm," taking hostages and liquidating them, with the battlefield being "clubs, cafés, and other meeting places, communication centers, flour mills, water plants and other vital economic installations." As for villages and urban neighborhoods that were suspected of planning operations, "everything possible in them should be burned and the houses of those who had incited or participated in operations should be blown up."[14] The UN Partition Plan however, compelled a more aggressive and pro-active strategy than that of warning and punitive actions, thus Plan Dalet (D). Plan Dalet's objective was to claim areas designated by the UN as parts of the Jewish state. But it was also "obvious that no Jewish colony outside the state would be abandoned or vacated and that the Haganah would do everything to organize their resistance."[15]

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine began immediately after the Partition Plan was adopted by the UN. In December 1947, supposedly reacting to Palestinian riots protesting the partition of the country, determined Zionist attacks on Palestinian areas resulted in the exodus of 75,000 people.[16] The delayed Arab response to calls for help left the Palestinian population most vulnerable. Only in September 1947, years after the gathering and exhaustive preparation of tens of thousands of Zionist troops in Palestine, did the Arab League form their Technical Military Committee to assess the situation. In December, the league agreed to supply the committee with a few thousand rifles and recruit three thousand volunteers (the Arab Liberation Army), which would first receive its training in Damascus, then be deployed to specific areas, mostly to defend the proposed Palestinian state. Considering such a pitiful response in most urgent times, the war to save Palestine was lost before it even began. However, nothing was to convince the villagers of Beit Daras to concede an enormously unequalled, ill-fated fight. The men scrambled to invest in a few rifles. Women volunteered their gold, and men donated much of their savings to purchase the rifles, an operation that was handled in extreme secrecy in nearby Isdud. At the height of the battle, Beit Daras possessed 19 rifles, seven of which didn't work.[17] Kitchen knives were sharpened, clubs were prepared and the chosen few were entrusted with old Turkish rifles, which, according to my father, required cleaning after every bullet fired. While retrospectively, the fight looked incredibly desperate, in Beit Daras, at the time, a great sense of pride prevailed, and, in fact, hope. They labored to hold steadfast, long enough to keep the Zionist forces at bay, until the Arab armies would emerge and bring the fight to an end. The Arabs, however, seemed to have other plans, if any at all.

BEIT DARAS AND PLAN DALET

The Zionist leadership, however, had a master plan. Plan Dalet was devised in stages and altered to accommodate political necessities. The final version, launched in April 1948, manifested in six major operations. Two of them, Operations Nachshon and Harel, aimed at destroying the Palestinian villages in and around the Jaffa-Jerusalem border. By cutting off the two main central areas that composed the proposed Palestinian state, according to the UN Partition Plan, the Zionist leadership wanted to break up any possibility of Palestinian geo-political cohesion, deny Arab fighters important supply routes, and protect isolated Jewish colonies in the south and the Negev. The two operations immediately pushed Beit Daras into the heart of the hostilities, despite the fact that the rest of the south was not yet a priority for Zionist military encroachment. Considering the fact that Beit Daras was already appreciated by Zionist strategists as a valuable area due to its proximity to Tabiyya, a military supply airport, and so on, the significance of the small village was now compounded.[18] Indeed, Beit Daras came under heavy shelling in the first week of the war. The heaviest shelling was on March 27–28, 1948,

killing nine villagers and destroying large areas of the village's crops.[19] The shelling originated from Tabiyya.

Um Mohammed al-Yazuri, now a grandmother living as a refugee in the Gaza Strip, was ten years old at the time. As a child, she was delegated by her father, a farmer from Beit Daras, to guard the field from birds and unruly children. She said the bombing originated from the area between Beit Daras and the village of al-Sawafir, in the east:

> They started shelling us from there. The shells fell on the houses. They killed children, cattle, and also men. We didn't have shelter in which to hide. We hid in the houses, but the bombs fell on the houses. They would go through the wall and fall on the houses, because the houses then were made of mud. [But] we stayed.[20]

On March 29, the village fighters struck back, ambushing a Zionist military caravan that was passing by the village. Although details of this particular engagement are sparse, it became clear to the Zionist military leadership in that area, even to David Ben-Gurion himself, that the Beit Daras threat had to be extinguished. The editors of Ben-Gurion's diaries made several mentions of Beit Daras, the first in reference to his decision on March 31 to organize a large military contingent to receive and ensure the safety of a large shipment of weapons that was about to land in "Beit Daras airport."[21] According to the diaries, the first airplane, laden with weapons from Czechoslovakia, was smuggled through Beit Daras airport. "Smuggled" is of course a misleading term, considering that the airport was under the authority and watchful eyes of the British. The succession of small battles that preceded and accompanied the transfers of the large cache of weapons must have also classified Beit Daras in the category of the most militant of villages, whose fate must be exceptionally harsh. On April 13, the Zionist militias returned with a vengeance and in greater numbers, now that they had realized the resolve of the village. Um 'Adel, mentioned in Chapter 1, recounted the second battle:

> They came a second time from two different directions. They shelled us first, then lots of soldiers poured in. It was a tough battle, but they couldn't occupy Beit Daras. We defeated them. They killed ten more people, including Theib Abu Zeina. But once again, they pulled out. Human remains were everywhere.[22]

Again, Um Mohammed:

> It was in April. The vegetables were just sprouting. The tomatoes, the apricots, the wheat, the barley, everything was in bloom. They [the people of Beit Daras] resisted. They resisted. But, whenever the British army realized that the Palestinians were defeating the Jews, it would intervene to support the Jews. On that afternoon, my mom left with my younger siblings.[23]

The British intervened to shield Zionist fighters on more than one occasion; most notably on May 1.[24] Zionist forces had moved into the village, from the direction of the elementary school, and stationed themselves there. Such a breakthrough would have not been possible were it not for the intense shelling that preceded the move. Beit Daras seemed incapable of withstanding the military pressure, as the school was located on a higher elevation, a strategic point that allowed Zionist snipers an unmatched advantage. However, Beit Daras, a village of stubborn men and women, was not to go down easily, as fighters from al-Majdal, Hamameh, Isdud, Fallujah, al-Sawafir, and more, descended with a show of solidarity that fundamentally changed the direction of the battle.[25] Once again, the British intervened to aid fleeing Zionist troops. Who would have thought that Beit Daras, a village of a few thousand and a few rifles, would put up such a fight? But the stakes were much higher and Beit Daras was expecting the worst.

Um Mohammed's mother left for al-Majdal, as did a few other families. Al-Majdal, a major town by the standards of that area, offered more security as it was not yet on the Zionist military's hitlist. Um Mohammed's father remained, and so did Um Mohammed and her sister, for a while; they chose to stay and look after their father and the family farm. The Zionist militias were soon to return.

But what about Grandpa Mohammed, Zeinab and their children?

Grandpa fought on the frontlines. The few rifles made it impossible for the men to all take part in the battle at the same time. So they divided the day into shifts, and each served guard and engaged in the fighting for a few hours. Grandpa faithfully served his shift, and, like the rest of the villagers, made his crops and belongings available for all. As the village's future was being determined quite rapidly, Beit Daras lived its most communal time. Men shared all, and women cooked for all. It's unclear whether fighters from the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) reached Beit Daras by then. However, a peculiar name, Tariq al-Ifriqi, seemed to resurface throughout my research. "Al-Ifriqi" means "the African," and it's a surname unfamiliar in the village. At times, Al-Ifriqi led the fight and trained the villagers. Knowing that the village was later defended by a Sudanese contingent, was al-Ifriqi a Sudanese volunteer with the ALA?

THE FINAL BATTLE

The date of the decisive battle, the one that emptied Beit Daras completely of its inhabitants is not easy to pinpoint, partly because Beit Daras was not defeated in a single battle, and the fight to regain Beit Daras had in fact extended to the closing stages of the war.

Israeli historian Benny Morris determined May 10 as the date that Beit Daras was defeated, an account that is not consistent with Ben-Gurion's own diaries. Morris determined that the main attack on Beit Daras was conducted by a Haganah unit known as the Givati, in an operation known as *Mivtza Barak*, Operation Lightning:

> On 9 May, the clearing of the southern end of the Givati's zone of control in anticipation of the Egyptian invasion began in earnest with the launching of Operation Lightning. The objective of the operation was: "To deny the enemy a base … creating general panic and breaking his morale … It can be assumed that delivering a blow to one or more of these centers [that is, al-Majdal, Isdud, Yibna] will cause the wandering [that is, the exodus] of the inhabitants of the smaller settlements in the area. This outcome is possible especially in view of the wave of panic that recently swept [the Arabs] of the country." Givati's attacks created the desired wave of panic and flight in the satellite villages. Mortaring almost invariably preceded each ground assault. The attack on Beit Daras on 10 May prompted the flight of its inhabitants and affected neighboring villages. The village houses were blown up.[26]

This account is however, contradictory to Ben-Gurion's, who referred to the attack on Beit Daras, under an entry on Wednesday, May 12:

> Beit Daras [west of Be'er Tuviya] was mortared. Fifty Arabs [were killed]. The [villages of] Bashit and Sawafir were occupied. There is mass exodus from nearby areas [neighbors in al-Majdal]. We sustained 5 dead and 15 wounded.[27]

While Ben-Gurion's date is very close to the one given by Morris, Ben-Gurion speaks of Beit Daras casualties but doesn't indicate that the attack succeeded in ending the resistance in Beit Daras on that day. It's rather peculiar considering that his entry on that day specifies all the villages, even the neighborhoods that were emptied of their inhabitants. Beit Daras was, obviously, still resisting.

May 21, according to Palestinian sources, was the day of the decisive battle and the massacre that followed. None of the Israeli sources makes mention of this. But even that date didn't seem to conclude the battle over Beit Daras:

> The Zionists attacked the village once more on May 21, 1948 with much more force and intense firepower. They surrounded the village from all directions. When the Beit Daras fighters realized the seriousness of this fight, they fought with more steadfastness, but called on women to take the children and leave. But once the fleeing families reaching the southern outskirts of the village, they were faced with indiscriminate Zionist shelling causing a massacre that is no less ugly than that of Deir Yassin. 265 victims fell on that day, mostly children, elders and women. But even then, the fighters would not abandon their posts.[28]

Um 'Adel recalls:

> The women and children were told to leave because the news of the Deir Yassin massacre was spreading and with it lots of fear. We were told that the Jews not only massacre people, but rape women. The women had to be

> sent away, but the men wouldn't leave. But so many of them were killed. The men fought like lions, and many were killed as well, including Abu Mansi Nassar, and his two brothers, Ali Mohammed Hussain al-Osaji, and four youths from al-Maqadima.[29]

Um Mohammed:

> The town was under bombardment, and it was surrounded from all directions. There was no way out. They surrounded it all, from the direction of Isdud, al-Sawafir and everywhere. We wanted to pursue a way out. The armed men [the Beit Daras fighters] said they were going to check on the road to Isdud, to see if it was open. They moved forward and shot a few shots to see if someone would return fire. No one did. But they [the Zionist forces] were hiding and waiting to ambush the people. The armed men returned and told the people to evacuate the women and children. The people went out [including] those who were gathered at my huge house, the family house. There were mostly children and kids in the house. Should a bomb hit the house, it would've killed them all. The armed men came and said, "The road to Isdud is open, evacuate the people." The Jews let the people get out, and then they whipped them with bombs and machine guns. More people fell than those who were able to run. My sister and I … started running through the fields; we'd fall and get up. My sister and I escaped together holding each other's hand. The people who took the main road were either killed or injured, and those who went through the fields. The firing was falling on the people like sand. The bombs from one side and the machine guns from the other. The Jews were on the hill; there was a school and a water reservoir for people and the vegetables. They showered the people with machine guns. A lot of the people died and got injured.[30]

But many fighters remained in Beit Daras. Not even a massacre would weaken their resolve. The wounded were gathered in many houses, but with little medical care to count on. Some of the dead were hurriedly buried. Many others were unreachable, lying in the sun amidst the blooming fields of spring.

The tragic events in Beit Daras were a stark embodiment of what was taking place in the whole of Palestine at the time. Plan Dalet was indeed coming to fruition with unexpected success, despite the steadfastness of the villagers and Arab irregulars. Operations Nachshon and Harel of April were progressing with varied degrees of success. The highway between Jaffa and Jerusalem was a theater for heroic battles, culminating in the battle of Castal, a few miles west of Jerusalem. The legendary Palestinian commander Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini fought his last battle there as he led a successful counterattack.[31] The Irgun and Stern gangs complemented the work of the Haganah, leaving their most memorable mark in the small village of Deir Yassin, three miles from Castal. The gruesome massacre of Deir Yassin, where nearly 250 Palestinians were killed was an ominous sign of what was to follow. ALA fighters, outnumbered and under-equipped, desperately tried to hold off the progress of the Haganah

and other Zionist forces in several fronts. The ALA commander Fawzi al-Qawukji tried to shift the battle into the Zionist stronghold in the colony of Mishmar Haemek near Haifa, but to no avail.[32] On April 10, the Arab League Palestine Committee held a meeting to further deliberate possible involvement in a war whose outcome was being determined exclusively by the Zionist leadership, with Palestinian villagers and irregulars fighting a desperate battle that often ended in ethnic cleansing, massacre and mass exodus.

Even before the official end of the British Mandate on May 15, British forces seemed to coordinate their movement to accommodate the Zionist military interest, to the total dismay of the Palestinians. On April 18, the British withdrew from Tiberias, which was immediately taken over by the Haganah, making it the first Palestinian town to fall into the hands of the Zionists. A major exodus followed into Transjordan and Syria. The pattern was repeated again, this time in Haifa, on April 21. The Haganah immediately launched Operation Misparayim. Haifa fell on April 23. In total panic, thousands more refugees crossed the border into Lebanon. Three more operations—Chametz, Jevussi and Yiftach—were launched by the Haganah and conquered Jaffa, Palestinian areas in and around Jerusalem, and the whole of eastern Galilee, respectively:[33]

> The Irgun anticipated Operation Chametz by launching its own offensive against Jaffa. By the end of April, the combined Haganah-Irgun offensive had completely encircled Jaffa, forcing most of the remaining civilians to flee by sea to Gaza or Egypt; many drowned in the process … The Palestinian collapse [at all fronts] resulted from bad leadership, totally inadequate civil defense arrangements, and military disparity in planning, numbers and firepower. By the end of April the Palestinian community was badly mangled. Tens of thousands of refugees were on the trek over land, with thousands more in transit at sea.[34]

According to Khalidi, the first meeting of Arab military heads regarding a possible intervention in Palestine didn't take place until April 30. One must wonder what reason lay behind the long delayed action. Was the meeting prompted by the fact that thousands of Palestinian refugees were now crossing over Arab countries' borders, thus burdening and embarrassing the Arab leadership, as their people fumed and demanded action in defense of Palestine? Perhaps hoping for a last-minute British intervention, the Arabs once more waited, and then finally agreed to send three divisions (less than the six divisions that their military leaders recommended), but only when the British Mandate ended on May 15. In the last days of the Mandate, the Haganah was proceeding with Plan Dalet, only to be hindered by the villagers of Beit Daras, and numerous others who by then had lost hope that the Arabs would ever come to their rescue. On May 8–9, Operation Maccabi took over the remaining villages between Ramleh and Latrun, followed by Operation Barak, in the south, which destroyed many villages, including Beit Daras. On May

12, Egypt agreed to intervene militarily. Beit Daras was still standing. On May 14, the British High Commissioner left Palestine.

The following day, President Truman formally recognized the state of Israel. The British leavetaking and the American assent gave the Zionists the impetus they needed to finish the job. Meanwhile, Beit Daras was still fighting on, badly bleeding, but the fighters were waiting below the hill. This precious place was not to be abandoned.

With the exception of a few fighters, now joined by ALA irregulars, the majority of Beit Daras's families had by the end of May sought shelter in nearby villages, mostly in the south, like Isdud, Hamameh and al-Majdal. Even after the massacre, they hoped to return soon to Beit Daras and rebuild what had been destroyed.

Um Mohammed's father was one of the few who refused to leave Beit Daras. He told his wife: "I want to stay here to thresh the wheat and the barley." That hope was not completely unfounded, however, as Egyptian forces made their entrance in Isdud, then to the outskirts of Beit Daras in late May, and again in early July. In fact, the Egyptian narrative on the fall of Beit Daras was made by no other than Gamal Abdel-Nasser, then a commander in the Egyptian army, and later the president of Egypt. Nasser asserted that Beit Daras didn't fall until a few days after the first truce on June 11. Zionist forces violated the truce and moved in with a large contingent and occupied Beit Daras.[35] After the end of the truce, on July 9, a Sudanese army unit, in coordination with Nasser's division retook Beit Daras, only to lose it again shortly after. Although Beit Daras by now had been completely lost, the villagers of Beit Daras would sneak back to check on their crops, gather some fruit and return to their hideouts. Many would never return. Soon after their escape to surrounding villages, the Beit Daras families escaped once more, mostly to Gaza, but also to Hebron. Many families were separated in the process, some never to reunite again.

After months of sporadic bombardment, Mohammed and his family, along with many of Beit Daras's villagers would finally and frantically scour their little mud-brick homes, dividing their possessions into those items they would have to part with and those that would be of use on the mysterious journey upon which they would soon embark. The latter amounted to a few old blankets, tea, sugar, rice, cheese, olives … and the scant necessities with which they could afford to burden their one faithful donkey. Coming to this grave decision took months, and resolving once and for all by no means brought a sense of relief. Mohammed sharpened the kitchen knife, the only implement he would have to protect his family should they be ambushed by Jewish militias along the unforeseen journey. Zeinab argued with herself in her mind whether they could afford the weight of packing a second pair of clothes for their five children. She gazed around her modest kitchen, with its soft earthen floors and simple wooden table in the center of the room. Garlic, peppers, dried mint, thyme and chamomile were all tied in bundles and adorned the earthen walls. At that moment, she felt that she wouldn't trade her home in Beit Daras for a palace. Mohammed and Zeinab had built this house with their own hands, and

while it was humble, it was the place where their children were born, where they had escaped poverty and gained prominence and merit among those in the community. Zeinab reminisced, worried about the future, and above all, felt an overwhelming sense of thankfulness for the life she and Mohammed had shared there. In that moment, she realized that the peace and simplicity of life in Beit Daras was something to be coveted by kings.

Spring was one of the most beautiful times of the year in the Palestinian countryside. With apricots, almonds, oranges and lemons in full bloom, the perfume carried itself on the wind for miles. As the villagers embarked on this rite of passage, many grasped a long moment to breathe in the fragrance of the fields and orchards, to snatch a large handful of the earth of Beit Daras, wrap it in a small piece of cloth and tuck it away for safekeeping. Deeds and keys also were stored safely.

TRAIL OF TEARS

Grandpa Mohammed mounted his faithful donkey with a few of the family's belongings and his young daughter Mariam. Ibrahim was in his mother's arms. Ahmad walked alongside his father, and my father, Mohammed, barefoot and confused, trotted behind. It was another trail of tears of sorts.

Neither parent had answers to the children's incessant question: "Where are we going?"

They headed south. That was all they knew. First to Isdud, then to Hamameh, then to Gaza. Everywhere they settled, they were chased with mortars and airplanes and bombs. As the bombardments progressed and more villages were razed, the roads became more and more populated, some people carrying on with a great sense of urgency, others wandering aimlessly, in a daze.

Grandpa Mohammed was a man of faith. He insisted that if the Arabs were to abandon the Palestinians, God would not. Muddied, with bloody feet and empty bellies, the children could hardly argue with their father's wisdom, even as they passed an occasional body in the middle of the road, or a frantic mother running in the opposite direction weeping for her lost children.

"God will take care of us," Grandpa Mohammed encouraged. Yet there was no one in sight but fleeing refugees, blown-up bodies, starved children and crying women. "What kept Beit Daras standing for a thousand years can always bring it back," he insisted. But the many trucks and numerous donkeys walking the dirt road, loaded with whatever families managed to salvage told of another story.

The number of refugees was growing by the hour. In Beit Daras, everyone knew everyone. But not anymore. The number of familiar faces was dwindling. Many died. Many fled elsewhere, and those heading to Gaza were now joined by so many new faces, equally pale and tearful, from numerous villages that extended beyond the world of Beit Daras.

Mohammed the son was hungry and he was tired. The sun was oppressive and beat down on the back of his neck; trotting behind his mother, he stopped under the shade of a tree for just a few moments. It didn't take long for the boy

to regain his strength and he ran ahead to catch up with his family. Meanwhile, Zeinab discovered that Mohammed was no longer behind her and couldn't remember the last time she had seen him. She became hysterical, calling his name and running aimlessly; a deep-seated pain in her belly warned her of losing her boy forever. She asked everyone that passed, "Peace be upon you, have you seen my boy, Mohammed?", or "For God's sake, have you seen my son? He is ten years old and he went missing this morning … ." But she was one of so many that had become separated from their children. Mothers and fathers would express their commiseration, others would say nothing, but for a short moment they would share a knowing gaze, and then sadly move on. After an eternity had passed that afternoon, Zeinab spotted her son, gently tugging on the sleeve of another mother, repeating the same supplications as Zeinab, "Peace be upon you, have you seen my mother?" In a mix of rage and relief, Zeinab swept Mohammed up into her arms, chastising him while smothering him with kisses. For the rest of the journey, Zeinab would never let anyone fall behind.

Grandpa Mohammed, though he managed to carve out a safe route for his family's future, lost every sense of direction, every element of sanity and control. In a matter of days, he was left with nothing but a donkey and a few old blankets. The family decided to leave the new blankets at home in Beit Daras, for they would be returning soon and didn't want the new blankets to be dirtied and damaged while they were away. Did Grandpa Mohammed know that Beit Daras was no longer the beloved village he left behind? The houses were blown up, the fields burned. The great mosque was razed with dynamite. The *diwans* where the *mukhtars* met to drink coffee with the elders of the village were gone. The elementary school. Al-Massriyyen neighborhood. The small mud-brick home with the dove tower. The citrus orchard that perfumed the village every spring. It was all gone.

Still standing, however, were two giant pillars demarcating where the old mosque once stood. Grandpa Mohammed spent much of his youth, resting against the mosques' white-washed walls, seeking God's mercy and blessing. "Allah always comes to the side of the oppressed," he told his family. Mohammed the son was worried about his school and his one textbook, the shattered hopes of an exciting summer, the friends whom he would never see again.

Abdallah Tayeh concludes his novel, *Moon in Beit Daras*:

> As for Jabr al-Mansour, he kept walking until he reached al-Sabra neighborhood in Gaza. He occasionally touched his coat pocket to make sure that the deed of his land was still there. He also checked on the key to his house in Beit Daras, and determined that the next day, he will take his son Rabah and return home. The rest of the people dispersed into many different directions. The Gaza sun fell into the sea, all at once. Behind the city's mosque, the daylight was turned off. And behind a darkened cloud, the moon abruptly disappeared, as did the stars and all the planets.[36]

4
A World Outside the Tent

When Mohammed Baroud, a ten-year-old boy from the now-distant village of Beit Daras removed a dirtied blanket that served as a door to his family's tent, the world outside was entirely different from what he once called home. There was little promise here, no lush farms in the distance, and no green meadows to serve as playgrounds. Instead, an awesome and terrifying sight greeted him: tents scattered as far as the eye could see, thousands of new anxious faces, neighbors he had never met, and a whole new reality with which he was hardly familiar. He was overwhelmed with fear and indecision, and quickly snuck back to lie down by his parents' side. They lay on a dirt floor: the father, broken and exhausted from the long journey to this strange place; Zeinab, the mother, whose limited knowledge of the world beyond Beit Daras didn't prepare her to even fathom where she was or why she was there, although glad that her family was still alive and not separated during the deadly journey; and four boys, including himself and a girl: Ahmad, Mohammed, Idris, Ibrahim and Mariam.

The violent uprooting that took place in a matter of days and weeks, turning the boy's world upside down, was yet to sink in. He stared at his sleeping family, covered in dust, with bleeding feet and swollen ankles. It may have all been a most convoluted nightmare, the kind that is stirred by the devil, not a heavy dinner, as his mom said once, delineating the seemingly significant difference in a most learned voice. True, he learned that the separation was quite important, for a devil's instigated nightmare could only be fought off with specific verses from the Qur'an. Oh, how he wished that he paid the slightest attention to his Qur'an lessons in his elementary school in Beit Daras! Nonetheless, he went back to sleep uttering all the verses that his scattered little brain could conjure up at a moment's notice.

OUTSIDE THE TENT

Mohammed's new nightmare was to be his true, everlasting reality. The age of warmth, plenty and open spaces was gone, and the age of the Gaza Strip was to commence.

The family arrived in the Gaza area sometime in the latter part of 1948. Like much of the population of southern Palestine, they had spent months fleeing from one village to the other, chased away at every corner by aerial bombardment or by snipers, who patiently awaited by dirt roads, in orange groves and on housetops. The safest travel methods were through thorny bushes and thickets, especially as the refugees approached areas bordering

Gaza. But those who made that decision also learned of its heavy price. As the Palestinian saying goes: "Death with friends is an act of mercy." True, dying alone must've proven much more horrific for those who failed to negotiate their way through the unmarked terrain and unfamiliar territory, who became lost and starved to death. Also, the retreating Egyptian army passed by the same roads that the Palestinian refugees were using to flee. When one of the army trucks, loaded with soldiers with darkened, tearful and bruised faces and bodies, would show up on the horizon, the refugees would frantically run in its direction, collectively begging for food. "A crumb of bread, soldier, for Allah's sake," "a sip of water, please, may Allah grant you victory," "help me, my children are dying," "a cigarette butt, my brother," are just some of the verses in the familiar chorus that often followed the beat-up army trucks, which hardly ever yielded or even slowed down. Some soldiers, however, did care enough to throw some of their rations to the refugees: a piece of cheese, a crust of bread, or to a very lucky child, a small piece of chocolate, softened by the warmth of Palestine's sun.

Gaza then was home to a population of 80,000, mostly Muslims, and a small Christian community that dwelled in urban centers: Gaza City, Khan Yunis, Deir al-Balah, and a few others. The rest were largely nomadic tribes that were scattered all about the Strip. The sudden arrival of well over 200,000 people disturbed the established demographics of the Gaza Strip and opened the door wide for hostility towards the vulnerable refugees, who had no other option but to become exploitable to the highest degrees imaginable. They had no other mechanisms that would ensure their survival. Some stood in endless lines to receive rations and handouts from the Quakers, the first international organization that arrived on the scene to help the refugees in Gaza. Others offered their services to the relatively wealthy families in the cities, and were used as maids and cheap laborers serving the nomadic tribes. They often received a small meal as pay for their long hours on the Gaza farms, one that a mother or father would divide among their children. One meal a day was no longer frowned upon, for some families were hardly so lucky.

The United Nations had yet to come to the refugees' aid. The plight of the refugees was not yet center stage, as war hostilities and political maneuvering had yet to be resolved. There was also ample, although idealistic, hope that the refugees would be repatriated, thus no need to establish a long-term regimen of humanitarian aid. Egypt invested little in helping the miserable population of Gaza, but still wanting to maintain the image that those living under its military administration would be well taken care of.

It was not until roughly two years after the Nakba, on May 1, 1950, that the UN General Assembly created the United Nations Relief and Work Agency, as a "temporary" organization to provide "temporary" aid, for the refugees who were soon, supposedly, to return home. The UNRWA replaced an *ad hoc* agency, the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees, a group that operated without staff or budget, only volunteers from the Red Cross and various religious organizations.[1] When UNRWA's staff made their way

to the refugee camps, harrowing images confronted them—and by extension the world—with a reality that they described as "unbearable":

> We went to see the refugees—thousands of men and women exposing their suffering in a mood of utter despair beneath a gray winter sky. Children by the hundreds, most of them half-naked—shoeless, shivering—conveyed the depth of their misery in gestures that were more eloquent than words. The parents showed us the camp, they showed us the holes in the ground—deep, like wells [trenches that were built by the British and later the Egyptian army]—where children were living in total darkness, piled one on top of the other on the icy rock.[2]

BEYOND THE FENCES

Neither Gaza's existing infrastructure at the time nor the refugees' survival instinct allowed education to be a priority at all. "School" was an immaterial word in a lexicon of still new terminology: bread, rations, tents, fences, bullets, death. The area separating Gaza from the new state of Israel was wide and largely unsecured. Within days of their arrival in Gaza, hungry refugees had picked and devoured any wild fruits and vegetation. Beyond the fences that were quickly erected to keep the refugees at bay, there existed an alluring death zone, where farms and gardens that once belonged to those same refugees lay untouched. The collective memories of Palestinians living in Gaza are loaded with long-forgotten names of those who dared to cut through the fence, to gather figs, oranges and cactus fruits in their shirts or scarves and then dash back to the other side of the fence.

A story haunted me for years, the tale of a distant cousin of my mother who stole away into the orchards to gather fruits for his family. After hours of waiting, his family began worrying when he had not returned. A few young friends decided to follow in his tracks, stealing away themselves into the forbidden zone. What they beheld was terrifying: the young man had been captured and shot, his body bruised and slashed, and his belly split wide open and stuffed to overflowing with plump, ripe figs. This young man, a husband and father, was one of so many apprehended by a sniper's bullet while trying to return safely back to a hungry family with the bounty from the many orchards that filled Gaza's countryside. For many days following the event, family, friends and relatives would in turn sneak into the orchard, this time not in an attempt to take fruit, but to retrieve the man's bloated body, but to no avail. Similar stories were plentiful, but such murders were not carried out as acts of vengeance: they were a harsh message to those among the refugees who dared to violate the new reality and break away from the open-air prison called Gaza, now assigned to them. It took many such killings for the refugees to refrain from entering the death zone, and to brave other fences, those of the Egyptian army.

Mohammed the son would be awakened each day at dawn. He would watch his father conclude his morning prayer and then, together, with empty

stomachs, they would head to one Egyptian army encampment or another, extend their arms well into the fence and beg. In a short while, thanks to hundreds of other refugees, who would encircle army camps for the same purpose, Mohammed the son developed a wealth of terminology that would break the heart of any Egyptian soldier, no matter how indifferent or unfeeling. He did so hesitantly and shamefully at first, but soon his entreaties developed into a rhythm, once he realized how dependent the family had become on the scraps Egyptian soldiers were willing to spare.

Zeinab joined thousands of mothers, working as cheap laborers in Gaza's farms, toiling all day for a few tomatoes, or, if lucky, enough money to purchase some tea and sugar.

Ahmad, the oldest son, on the other hand, found a job at a quarry. His muscular build was more than suitable for such rigorous labor, and amongst the frail-looking refugees, he seemed a suitable candidate. Barefoot like the rest, he spent nearly twelve hours a day breaking up rocks near the Gaza Valley, lifting large stones and returning home with a sheer exhaustion that was unfamiliar, even to the father's already high standards of hard work. Unlike the rest, Ahmad didn't return with crumbs, but with cash, sparse, but enough to secure some food and milk for baby Ibrahim. Needless to say, Ahmad's standing in the family was now at an all-time high. The son, who had brought unmatched honor for being one of a very few children in Beit Daras to attend middle school in Jaffa, was now taking on the responsibility of caring for the whole family. Moreover, at around age 16, Ahmad helped secure a job for his father at the same quarry. The family would then wake up at dawn, the father and Ahmad would head to the quarry, walking several miles on foot, and Mohammed, too young to withstand the manual labor of such a place, would join hundreds of his newly made friends and peers at some fence near some military barracks: "a crumb for a hungry boy, soldier?," "For every good deed, Allah will give you ten times in return."

OUTCAST

The indignities that the boy had suffered at a young age were compounded by the fact that, unlike his older brother, he was not a source of pride to his parents. Both brothers would return to their tent after dark, one with a few precious coins, the other with some bits of dried bread and stale cheese. Zeinab reacted to what they had earned in ways that corresponded to the material value of their earnings. Ahmad would be received by warm embraces and a hot meal, and Mohammed would be asked to collect wood so that Ahmad would relax his tired feet in warm water and salt.

Mohammed the son grew resentful and began to disobey orders. The boy's rebellious spirit was perhaps an inborn one, and surely preceded the war and the 1948 catastrophe. It was evident in him, even before he saw defeat marking the faces of fleeing Palestinians and retreating Egyptian soldiers. But that free, rebellious spirit was to reach its heights in latter years, and with it,

merciless reprimands and beatings. The more he resented his parents' unfair treatment, the more punishment he received.

One day, Mohammed simply refused to beg. The taunts and insults of the Egyptian soldiers pushed him to the brink. Familiar with his stubbornness, his family assigned him to another job, one that could bring little income, but most importantly keep him away for as many hours of the day as possible. All that was required was a wooden tray that he would hang around his neck. Carefully placed in it were a few items that the father would buy once a week from a Gaza shop: needles and thread, combs, packs of chewing gum, and a few other cheap knick-knacks. Mohammed was sent on long, dangerous missions with his prized items, to places well beyond the Gaza Valley, where nomadic families were restricted, because of the distance and other factors, from shopping at the city's market.

Mohammed would not return home without selling everything on his tray. If he failed to do so, he would return late at night hiding behind an older neighbor who would come to appeal his case to Zeinab, to spare the boy a beating he didn't deserve. Zeinab's strong personality developed into a hostile one, at least that is how young Mohammed perceived it. She, along with her oldest son, Ahmad, became the boy's greatest tormentors. It was as if the feelings of helplessness, despair and defeat were channeled into angry energy aimed solely at subjugating an equally hapless and defeated young boy.

HISTORY

Gaza itself was largely irrelevant, if not revolting, from the point of view of the refugees who poured into the Strip mostly from the south of Palestine, for it represented the pinnacle of their loss, humiliation and ultimately, despair. It mattered little to Grandpa Mohammed that he probably walked on the same ancient road that ran along the Palestinian coast, when Gaza was once the last metropolis for travelers to Egypt, just before they embarked on an unforgiving desert journey through Sinai.[3]

For the poor man, that road was a daily journey to hell and back to an equally hellish fate in a worn-out tent. So what if Gaza was described as the city, as told in the Book of Judges, where Samson performed his famous deed and perished.[4] Christianity was relevant to the refugees insofar as a few of Gaza's ancient churches provided shelter to the tired bodies escaping snipers, bullets and massacres. Even the strong belief amongst Muslims that the Prophet Mohammed's great-grandfather, Hashem, died on one of his journeys from Mecca to the Levant and was buried in Gaza,[5] was largely sentimental. His shrine in Gaza City was visited by numerous refugees, who kneeled and prayed to God that they, some day soon, would be sent back to their humble existence, and their ways of life from which they had been forcefully estranged. Gaza, that small place now brimming with wanderers, was loaded with history, stories that were saturated with conquerors and tragedies, but also goodness. A pilgrim to the Holy Land, who passed through Gaza in 570 AD, wrote in Latin, "Gaza is a splendid city, full of pleasant

things; the men in it are most honest, distinguished by every generosity, and warm friends and visitors."[6]

But Gaza had no "pleasant things" to offer the refugees. Its people remained "most honest" and generous, but what is the use of generosity, when there is nothing to share, nothing to give or be given?

TURMOIL IN EGYPT

In fact, the fate of the new arrivals had quickly translated in worsening the somewhat stable lives of the Strip's original inhabitants. Many among them quickly descended into poverty, but since they were not officially recognized by international institutions as "refugees," they were denied all help. The UN said Egypt was the sole responsible party for the plight of the "non-refugees." Yet Egypt was experiencing defeat in the south of Palestine and their forces were quickly retreating. The country itself was in turmoil and on the verge of revolution. There were no more funds to be channeled to Gaza's population, refugees or not; if any funds were to be found at all, King Farouk of Egypt was making sure that they were spent on his family and cronies. Indeed, the misery in Gaza was an extension of that in Egypt, and in some strange way, the failed Egyptian military intervention in southern Palestine had much to do with the revolution that followed in Egypt in 1952.

Gamal Abdel-Nasser was an officer in the Egyptian army in 1948. He crossed Sinai to Gaza by train to take part in defending Palestine, or what remained of it. He was stationed in Fallujah, a village located to the north of Gaza. His unit, on more than one occasion tried to recapture the hills near Beit Daras, Grandpa Mohammed's destroyed village. They failed. His troops were under-armed and had been deployed without a clear mandate. Then there was the discovery that many Egyptian army units were supplied with deliberately faulty weapons. The news sent shockwaves throughout the army, but was not enough to demoralize Nasser and a few Egyptian soldiers, who held in the Fallujah pocket for weeks. Their resistance became the stuff of legends.

Nasser marched to Cairo, and in 1952, along with a few army officers, overthrew the King and his government. Nasser cited Palestine as a key reason behind the rebellion. The defeat signified all the ills that had afflicted Egypt under the King and his royal family.

Palestinians, especially those in Gaza, saw in Nasser a liberator, a hero, someone who was genuinely interested in delivering them from misery and destitution. And why wouldn't they? He was the same man they turned out to wave to, along with his fellow officers and soldiers, as they passed by Gaza, back to Egypt following the battle of Fallujah. That was a rare moment of pride and hope, when the officers crossed with their weapons, and huge crowds of refugees flooded the streets to meet them, crying the chants of freedom. Young Mohammed too chased after the army trucks. He saw Nasser on that day, he claimed, or perhaps wanted to believe. But the boy would receive a personal letter from Nasser in the years that followed, when the latter's

revolution triumphed, and he became the president of the Arab Republic of Egypt. Nasser, for better or worse, was kinder to the Palestinians than they were used to from various Arab rulers. The refugees adored him.

HOPE

Following the Egyptian revolution, Nasser's administration tried to restore a sense of normalcy to Gaza, by reopening some of the schools that had been forced to shut down due to war and poverty. The lack of qualified teachers represented a rare opportunity for the small Baroud family. Ahmad, the oldest son, applied for a job as a teacher, although his last formal education was at middle school in Jaffa. However, he was particularly smart and persuasive. His application was accepted and he soon replaced his shabby clothes of the Gaza quarry with a garment suitable for an elementary school teacher. Although times had changed, Ahmad managed to restore his sense of direction. He studied for his high school exams at night, and woke up in the wee morning hours to resume his teaching career. Ahmad was argumentative and stubborn, qualities that came in handy as he tried to carve out a life for himself when the word "opportunity" was still defined by the standard of a hearty meal, or an unblemished piece of clothing. The young teacher also excelled in the English language. The stack of books that represented casual reads for him was neatly kept in his parents' home for many years after he left the Strip. His interest in psychology and political theory at a very young age still puzzles me to this day.

His younger brother Mohammed, however, was not able to claim similar successes. Equally intelligent, but with greater interests in history and literature, he was seen as undeserving of such opportunities. One successful son in Gaza's harsh reality was more than one single family could ever hope for. The father wanted to play it right: Ahmad in teaching and Mohammed in manual labor was a good compromise and would bring in a reasonable income. Such a compromise was hardly reasonable from Mohammed's perspective, who would rebel and receive his due punishment regularly. Well into his teenage years, Mohammed was still selling candies and matches to nomadic tribes. His job grew more humiliating as he grew older. He took up smoking, collecting cigarette butts found around Egyptian army camps. He ran away from home for days on end. His body became so accustomed to hardship and abuse that he no longer sought the intervention of elder neighbors. He slept in an abandoned army barracks and bought meager food with his humble income. But he also decided to teach himself, since he was denied schooling, by picking up any discarded book or newspaper and reading for hours on end, trying to decode the language.

Mohammed spent much of his time in the streets. And the streets of crowded Gaza were rife with most interesting stories and exciting happenings for the teenage boy. Some Palestinians were adjusting to the new reality. Egypt funneled badly needed funds into developing Gaza. But the Egyptian move was not understood plainly as an act of solidarity or even charity. King Abdullah

of Transjordan was moving quickly to make himself the sole guardian of Palestinian affairs in the post-1948 reality. He argued against having a Palestinian leadership take charge of representing Palestinians, a position that was strongly contested by the Palestinian Arab Higher Committee, supported by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini. Al-Husseini worked with members of his committee to declare a post-war Palestinian leadership, with new blood and fresh priorities, by announcing the formation of a Palestinian government in Gaza, just as Israel was sealing its victory.[7]

The move raised not only the ire of King Abdullah, but also Egyptian concerns. In latter years, both Egypt and Transjordan labored to ensure that the only Palestinian "leadership" that would enjoy any sense of legitimacy within their domains would be one managed by them; thus Egypt and Transjordan quarreled amongst themselves, but also with unruly Palestinians, those who insisted to represent themselves.

THE FEDAYEEN

That's what young Mohammed saw and heard, the outcome of these quarrels, the intense conversations at Gaza's coffee shops, Egyptian soldiers and officials roaming the streets, of Palestinian leaders holding their own unsanctioned meetings, and being summoned by Egyptian intelligence in Cairo for daring to do so. But most impressive amongst all the happenings were the Fedayeen, the Palestinian guerrilla commandos and their daring strikes deep inside Israel. The Fedayeen were mostly young Palestinian refugees, but also included some Egyptian fighters who operated outside the scope of their government, Islamic fighters and others. Their operations grew bolder by the day. They would sneak into Israel, like ghosts in the night, with primitive weapons and homemade bombs. They would kill Israeli soldiers, steal their weapons and return with the new weapons. Some would sneak back into their villages in Palestine, "stealing" food, blankets and whatever money they had saved but failed to retrieve in the rush of war. Those who did not return received a martyr's funeral, where thousands of refugees would march carrying symbolic coffins into some graveyard. Indeed, hundreds wouldn't return and few bodies were ever recovered. Following every Fedayeen strike, the Israeli army would strike Gaza's refugees, inspiring yet more support and recruits for the growing commando movement.

Mohammed saw in the Fedayeen and their stories a heroic escape from his humiliating life. As envious as he was of his older brother, he no longer fantasized about being a teacher. Freedom fighting became his new calling. The Fedayeen were the antithesis to his humiliation and submissiveness, and a manifestation of all the anger and frustration he felt. He wanted to go back to Beit Daras so badly that he would constantly investigate whether any of the commandos passed by his village, or had a glimpse of his old school by the hill. He offered his services as a watchman for the Fedayeen as they made their initial, and most dangerous, crossovers into Israel. He would try to impress his family with his bravery. They ridiculed his active imagination and asked him

to keep his focus on selling his knick-knacks. But Mohammed was adamant that he would join a resistance group as soon as it was possible.

The Fedayeen's daring attacks inside Israel intensified, as did Israeli reprisals, which targeted the Egyptian army and Palestinian civilians. In 1955, Nasser paid a visit to Gaza, assuring the angry refugees that his government would do its utmost to ensure their safety, and return to their homes. But Israel had other ideas, as it began an intense bombing campaign that killed and wounded scores of people. Palestinians in Gaza took to the streets in anger, denouncing Israel, expressing disappointment in Egypt and decrying the failure of the international community to protect them. Under increasing pressure, Egypt decided to establish ten battalions of National Guard made up mostly of Palestinian Fedayeen, led by Egyptian officers. It was, once again, a reluctant Egyptian attempt to take charge of the situation and control the scattered Palestinian leaderships and its armed factions. Cross-border skirmishes culminated, at times, into full-blown border battles. Israeli mortar attacks reached many areas in Gaza. There was no safe place to hide.

Israel justified its actions as a natural response to protect its borders. Palestinians couldn't comprehend the claim, knowing that their villages still stood where they had been for hundreds of years, in areas that Israel now claimed. Mohammed strongly believed that the path to Beit Daras started with the first step of the Fedayeen's bold incursions into Israel, to his homeland.

He was about to enlist when President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company. Anticipating a violent response from Britain, he deployed additional forces to the Gaza and Sinai region. Meanwhile, Israel, Britain and France were plotting a decisive move to crush Nasser's government and army, and to allow Israel's further expansion in the south, into Egypt itself. On October 29, war broke out. Overwhelmed by the sudden military encroachment and anticipating similar British-French moves, Nasser ordered a general withdrawal from Sinai. Egyptian forces and Fedayeen units were told to surrender in Gaza. A Palestinian garrison in Khan Yunis, south of Gaza City, refused and was overwhelmed by Israeli tanks and aerial bombardment. By November 2, 1956, the whole of the Gaza Strip and large swathes of Sinai were under Israeli control.[8] The refugees were now under occupation.

The Suez crisis was soon to be diffused, thanks in part to the round condemnations of the tri-alliance (Britain, France and Israel) by the international community. The United States government, which was perceived, or wanted to perceive itself, as the new power in the Middle East after World War II, was enraged by the British-French-Israeli alliance and invasion of Egypt. (British and French paratroops landed at the northern end of the Suez Canal on November 5.) The US displayed no patience and accepted no delays in the withdrawal of foreign forces from Sinai. On December 22, Britain and France withdrew, an act that was perceived in Egypt as a great victory for Nasser and the revolution. The Israelis haggled with dates, and pro-Israeli forces in Washington began exerting pressure on the United States not to interfere. Four months after their takeover of Gaza, Israeli forces withdrew, but only after receiving assurances that the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) would

take charge of Gaza. The four months of turmoil had awakened the refugees to the reality that Gaza, as distant as it was, would never be a safe haven. The UNEF troops were not liked by the Gazans, who marched in protest, demanding the return of the Egyptian administration. Gazan hostility toward international forces at the time was a reflection of their general mistrust in the international community, whose policies and actions were frequently crafted by the great powers, and who seemed keenly interested in Israel's future, and not at all in the rights and welfare of the refugees. The mass protests in Gaza in those days, and the fact that UNEF hurriedly dismantled its posts and evacuated the Strip was the boost of confidence Palestinians in Gaza needed to believe that popular mobilization was rewarding. It was reminiscent of the days of the early popular rebellions, of the late 1920s, and most notably the strike of 1936. But the Egyptian military stayed out of Gaza, while UN troops patrolled the Gaza-Israel border.[9]

Mohammed watched the events unfolding in awe: the retreat of the Egyptian army, the quick reappearance of Israel, the remarkable determination of the Fedayeen, and finally the massive demonstrations that represented an imprint of people's power, his people's power. His desire to learn was no longer aimed at impressing his conceited older brother, or his unconvinced parents. Two goals occupied his every fiber at the time: self-education and joining the army. Both wishes were duly granted, but at a heavy price.

5
Lost and Found

As Egyptians wholeheartedly celebrated the triumph of the revolution, Gaza hesitantly joined in. Israeli forces remained in Gaza until March 1957, two months after it abandoned its war gains in Egypt. There was little question in the minds of most Gazans that Israel's brief occupation, its delay in withdrawal and insistence on being replaced by international forces was not the end of their conflict with the Israeli military. Gaza was not as far from Beit Daras as the Baroud family had once hoped. This realization engendered fear, and called for preparedness as more bloody encounters were expected. Not an inch in that small stretch of land that is the Gaza Strip was safe from or immune to the sort of violence that occurred in 1956–57. Over 1,200 Palestinians were killed in the war. Not one town, village or refugee camp failed to report dead and wounded,[1] and there were funerals everywhere. The same images of the barely distant past were once again haunting the refugees, those of funeral processions, mourners and grieving mothers. A sense of loss and desperation followed every conflict and a turning to God for answers.

GAZA IS CHANGING

Gaza's local political leaders and clergy rose to the occasion. They reminded the panic-stricken refugees that after all, it was Gaza that always remained standing when all conquerors faded away. This was the recurring lesson since time immemorial. Ancient Egyptians came and went, as did the Hyksos, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Ottomans, the British, and now the Israelis. And through it all, Gaza stood strong and defiant. Neither Alexander the Great's bloody conquest of 332 BC, nor Alexander Janneus's brutal attack of 96 BC broke Gaza's spirit or took away from its eternal grandeur. It always rose again to reach a degree of civilization unheard of, as it did in the fifth century AD. It was in Gaza that the Crusaders surrendered their strategic control of the city to Saladin in 1170, only to open up yet another era of prosperity and growth, occasionally interrupted by conquerors and outsiders with colonial designs, but to no avail. Neglected ruins of past civilizations were only reminders that Gaza's enemies would never prevail, and would, at best, merely register their presence with another neglected structure of mortar and stone.[2]

Gazans had much to ponder, much to fear, but also to remind them of their collective strength and resolve. But 1957 was a year of introspection. Gaza began seeing itself as a region that harbored more than a poor population on the verge of, if not deeply entrenched in, a humanitarian catastrophe. The

allure, although not the respect, of Nasser began to fade as Gazans watched the Egyptian army retreating in defeat. Nasser's framed portraits were not removed from the mud houses of the refugees, nor did Gaza's elders cease praying for his victory, but there was also a young generation, radicalized and politicized by the war, which was ready to take charge of Gaza, its refugees and its fate.

Nasser, weakened by a military defeat that had been dubbed a political victory, became more inclined to accept some of Gaza's demands. In 1958, he took several steps that were seen by most Gazans as unconvincing yet important political gains. He authorized the creation of an executive council in Gaza, along with an elected legislative council.[3] Members of the council stood on the ticket of the Arab Socialist Union, the only political party sanctioned by the Egyptian government. Despite the fact that the councils had limited powers, for Gaza, this event was very significant, for it allowed for political organization within the community, and the rise of new political leadership, which eventually evolved to play an important role in representing and defending Palestinians and their rights. While the councils included many notables mainly concerned with representing their own interests, they also included respected local leaders such as Dr. Haidar Abd al-Shafi. The post-war years were a time of political organization, but also a redefining of relationships, within Gaza itself and with the outside world; Egypt, the rest of the Arab countries, the international community and, of course, Israel. As for the latter, the refugees of Gaza were no longer running away from the ever brutal Israeli army, for there was nowhere to run, even if they wished to escape their misery.

Then, one morning, Mohammed left. For a moment, he hoped that someone would catch him leaving without his goods and order him back. But no one did, even as the wooden door to the family's mud house scraped the earthen threshold. He hesitated, and twice checked on a piece of dried bread and cheese that was carefully wrapped in newspaper. He reached the main road, that same ancient road on which travelers the world over had once walked. He imagined himself an aimless traveler, a poet seeking his beloved, a merchant in search of rarities, an adventurer who could only welcome the unknown. He gazed north, to the road that once lead to Beit Daras. He saw the fences and the tracks of Israeli military vehicles. He swore he could hear the screams of so many victims who died there, attempting to cross to Gaza, or seeking the way back home. He shuddered, turned around and headed south.

DESTINATION: EGYPT

He ducked behind the bushes with the rest. He waited, breathlessly as the train made its way to another station. And in a precise moment, one that could have been the difference between life and death, he leapt forward, and landed in an empty car. Almost immediately, the train gathered speed as it cleared the inhabited areas of central Gaza. Mohammed stood in total shock as he looked back, while trying to keep his balance in the barren train car. He

struggled to estimate his location as the train sped away. He was no longer able to see his refugee camp or the road that once led to Beit Daras. These were the two very places that once defined his spatial awareness: Beit Daras and the refugee camp. He felt unfocused, overwhelmed, and fear-stricken. He tried to comfort himself with the fact that while the way south was unknown to him, the road north was filled with nothing but bad memories. As Gaza shrank in the distance, and as sand and wind occupied the scene outside the train, Mohammed chose a corner in the empty car and tried to fall asleep, for the more he thought, the more he dreaded the coming days and years. And for a moment, he thought of his parents, and he missed them, and silently cried.

THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE TRAIN

Outside the train, Mohammed witnessed the evidence of the fresh battles fought in the desert. When the Egyptian military was ordered to retreat from Gaza, and from southern Sinai in late 1956, not all the units retreated; some put up tough resistance, in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip, in Arish and elsewhere in Sinai.[4] Burnt-out military vehicles, bombed army headquarters, devastated troop barracks, scattered army boots were all the signs that Mohammed needed to appreciate the ferocity of the battle, unequalled as it were, that had taken place there. The world outside the train was terrifying, eerily empty, save for the occasional sight of a military encampment, a herd of sheep, or the humble dwellings of Sinai's many tribes. This was not the world that Mohammed had hoped to reach. Suddenly Gaza seemed warmer and more welcoming. But there was no time for doubt. The journey had already commenced, and Mohammed had luckily managed to survive the Egyptian military inspection at the border, the meddlesome international forces and all sorts of risks. There was no turning back.

THE ROAD ENDS HERE

As the train neared Bir al-'Abid, halfway between Rafah and Qantara at the Suez Canal, the train came to what seemed like a scheduled stop. Mohammed's bread crust and old cheese were long gone. Tired and hungry, Mohammed waited for the journey to resume, but it didn't. The train's bells and whistles fell silent, and the roaring engine seemed to have halted for good. Cautiously, Mohammed peaked outside. A group of soldiers were moving from one car to another, looking for stowaways or smuggled goods. Just before they reached him, he carefully lowered himself onto the ground and ran, aimlessly and as fast as his feet could carry him. He knew what he was running from, but hadn't an idea where he was going. He could hardly feel the hot gravel and sand under his bare feet, nor recall how far or fast he ran that day. Like a mirage, the humble dwellings of a nomadic tribe appeared in the distance, a mix of tents and huts positioned against the backdrop of endless sand dunes. It was too surreal and peaceful, and devoid of any evidence of war. A few dogs had detected the presence of a stranger and howled unstopped. An old

man stepped out of his tent, and with poise walked towards the frightened boy, guiding him with care to a shady tent that stood in the center of the nomadic settlement. Exhausted, Mohammed collapsed, and in the background a commotion ensued.

THE TRIBE

When Mohammed was revived, he found himself in the care of the old man and his wife. The man, a sheikh, was large and had a well-groomed beard, a sign of piety. His wife looked kindly, despite her facial tattoos and silver jewelry which dangled almost painfully from her nose and earlobes. Nomadic Arab tradition required that strangers seeking protection or shelter were not to be questioned, not even to be asked their name or family connection for three days, a tradition that served as an insurance policy for poor souls in flight, who were often escaping family and blood feuds. True to tradition, the kind sheikh asked Mohammed little, and knew nothing of the boy's story, no matter how curious he was as to why this young man, nearing his eighteenth year, was alone and wandering in Egypt's deserts. Mohammed eventually told the sheikh that he was a Palestinian who had fled the war, and requested an extended stay. The sheikh happily obliged, especially once he learned that the newcomer was literate. No one in the village knew how to read or write, which almost immediately placed Mohammed in a position of high regard. Mohammed's literacy qualified him as the tribe's Qur'an teacher.

Mohammed knew well that he was no teacher, regardless of the subject to be taught. Nonetheless, he happily embraced his new position, which earned him no salary, but shelter and a great deal of kindness. The boy, forced first to flee his home at a young age, and then to beg and sell cheap goods far away from his family, would sit every evening in the sheikh's humble *diwan*, surrounded by young and old, as he recited verses from the Qur'an. Years later, Mohammed would often laughingly reminisce about his first official career in a self-deprecating way. He admitted that he understood little of what he was reading, and mispronounced every other word. Lucky for him, his students understood nothing, but nodded their heads in contemplative agreement following Mohammed's every pronouncement. The boy tried to avoid offering personal interpretations of the verses he read, at least as long as his students seemed to agree. But a particularly inquisitive student would require an occasional elaboration. Mohammed, again, would confidently offer his take on the Qur'an, clueless of what he was reading, but ever assured by his pupils' trust in his immense knowledge.

The new arrangement would have been very suitable and long-lasting, except that Mohammed missed his family, and longed for Gaza. This trip had taught him something about himself, however, of qualities that he would use time and again. He was tough, perceptive, smart and capable of surviving on his own, even if lost in a vast desert. The sheikh and his wife wanted Mohammed to stay. The couple liked Mohammed, not only because of their erroneous perception of him as a devotee, but also because of his polite and considerate

disposition. His handsome face, and humble demeanor, and the fact that they had no children of their own, made Mohammed a perfect candidate for the son the aging couple never had. However, a year later, Mohammed asked to be relieved of his duties as Qur'an teacher and prospective son, and asked to return home. The couple sorrowfully obliged, and, along with others, accompanied Mohammed back to the nearest train station, and watched his train disappear into the horizon towards Gaza. This time he was spared the dangers of jumping a speeding train, and he sat like any other respectable passenger. He firmly held his sack of clothes and provisions for the journey home. He also clutched a copy of the Qur'an, the sheikh's farewell token to Mohammed, who had spent nearly a year at his surrogate home, ample time to restore his faith in people and confidence in himself.

BACK TO GAZA

When Mohammed returned to Gaza, he found the same place he had left a year or so earlier, the same military structures dotting the cities, the same gloomy, skeptical faces feeling trapped, but incessantly trying to survive their fate. The refugees were still stateless, and poverty was rampant. The Egyptian military presence was kept to a minimum, although the Strip was still administered by an Egyptian military governor. The prevailing feeling was that of doom, although the rhetoric of the leadership, whether in Gaza or Cairo, was feisty and confident. Locals spoke of a looming confrontation, for they believed that Israel would never allow things to settle at their current state. The Egyptian revolutionary project was losing some, although not all, of its appeal among the masses. Gaza, as the rest of Palestine, provided the perfect rallying cry for pan-Arabism, genuine or not. Every Arab leader insisted on being the ultimate champion of Palestinian rights. Gazans would hear of lavish banquets held in their honor, massive rallies, more decrees, generous gifts, special prayers, busy conferences, but, strangely, would notice no change in their daily lives. They labored, fighting amongst each other for diminishing resources, standing in line to receive insignificant international aid, and so on. Nonetheless, they refused to subscribe to any new reality that was not of their choosing. Although separated by time and distance from their former villages and towns, they insisted on identifying with who they were, then, and where they came from. Mohammed, of Nuseirat refugee camp, who fled to Sinai and returned, was still from a small village called Beit Daras, and no other place. Neither Israel's military strength, nor the unconditional backing of the United States and a few other Western powers that the latter enjoyed would ever take away his relationship with, and memories of, a seemingly non-existent entity.

But for now, he was back in Gaza. He wanted to convince himself that he was a changed person, a man, even. Sinai, for him, was a rite of passage of sorts. He felt that he earned the right to be respected, to do as he pleased, and what he truly wished for was to be loved. He had left home and been gone for one whole year and had made no attempt to contact his family.

What would he say at this point to explain his absence? What words could he possibly put together to articulate his departure, and return? He entered his neighborhood, and determinedly walked towards his house, oblivious to the whispers of shocked neighbors, the awkward pause that struck some of them, and, to the storm that awaited him. Would he be rejected again? Would the family disown him for good? Would he be forced again to seek the kindly tribe in Sinai that he so reluctantly abandoned?

It was Mariam, Mohammed's younger sister, who opened the door. Taking a brief look, she immediately turned and ran back into the house shouting "Mohammed is at the door!" It was the father who first rushed to investigate Mariam's claim. And here he was, his absent son. The two stood facing each other in mutual speechlessness. Breaking the silence and any trivial concern that an outpouring of emotions could convey weakness, the father ferociously embraced his son and wept, kissing his forehead and face. Within minutes, an assembly of neighbors, friends and family had gathered in a rare moment of happiness. Their tragedies almost never had happy endings. The unexplained disappearance, presumed death and jubilant reappearance of Mohammed was an exception. Maybe there was hope after all.

WHILE YOU WERE GONE

When Mohammed ran away from home, the family had assumed that his absence was consistent with his occasional protests, and anticipated him back shortly. But as days and weeks went by, their hope of his return petered out, and they began to fear the worst. They inquired at police stations and checked at the morgue, but to no avail. Zeinab soon gave up, but not the father, who accused his wife and her oldest son of driving Mohammed away. He took a rare stance against the unequal relationship that Zeinab had with her sons. But Mohammed was not there to witness it. Months later, the family held a funeral, for they all assumed that Mohammed was surely dead. The father, once again, turned to the mosque, as he always did in times of crisis. Mohammed was to learn that his father never stopped mourning and was sure to lose his mind if Mohammed never returned. The father was accustomed to loss after all, despite all that he had been through. But losing Mohammed was, perhaps, more than the poor man could endure.

Mohammed's return signaled a new beginning, one that was not merely created by circumstances, but by Mohammed himself. The young man was confident and ready to embark on a new life. Somehow, he managed to divorce himself from the state of pity that accompanied him most of his life. He was no longer afraid, and elatedly described his adventures in Egypt. The neighbors sought his company, to hear more about the audacious young man who dared to defy the limitations imposed on Gazans and wandered into the desert with no food, no shoes and no friends. The father was immensely proud of his son. The boy who had been relegated to the most humiliating of tasks was now a confident young man who brought back stories of an otherwise unheard world beyond the boundaries of Gaza. "Like father, like son" some

would comment, mustering a sense of great pride in both the father and the son. It cost Mohammed one year in the desert to reconnect with his father, to feel accepted again, a worthwhile investment.

It was during an evening that seemed like any other that Mohammed, with poise and coolness, but also with a solemn voice, considering the seriousness of his statement declared that he would be joining the army. Despite the self-assuredness in Mohammed's voice, his decision was not an easy one. Since their flight from Beit Daras, many years prior, Mohammed had not stopped running. He ran from Zionist gangs, along with his family, from one village to the next, and across a trail of blood and tears into Gaza. There he was chased away by jeering Egyptian soldiers as he begged for crumbs, he ran from his family's wrath who accused him of being unruly. But his journey in the desert represented an awakening for him. He was unclear of the precise moment when he felt compelled to stop running. Nonetheless, he did, and he was ready to face his reality, as grim as it was, and to take charge of his life and make his own decisions. He declared his intention to join the Palestinian unit in the Egyptian army. Strangely, no member of his family chuckled upon hearing his statement. His father looked him in the eyes, and cautioned him about the kind of life he had chosen for himself. The following morning, Mohammed underwent health and fitness testing, while his records were examined for any criminal past. Luckily, Mohammed's mild asthma at the time was not considered an impairment, and in a few days, he was officially enlisted in the Egyptian army. The father wasted no time in enlarging a copy of Mohammed's military ID to be enclosed in a gilded frame and displayed in the family's living room. In the center of the frame, an oval-shaped military stamp read: "Military ID – Mohammed Baroud; Place of Birth: Beit Daras; Place of Residence: Nuseirat refugee camp."

ARMY LIFE

Enlisting in the army is one thing; joining an ill-prepared army unit in the Gaza Strip facing formidable Israeli forces during the very tense years of the late 1950s was an act of insanity. But Mohammed understood the dangers that surrounded his decision more than anyone else, for as he traveled between Gaza and Sinai, he had witnessed the destruction of war, the overwhelming evidence of the death of many souls who had perished in Gaza and Sinai. He even entertained himself by counting the many military vehicles that had been burnt or left abandoned in the desert. They were too many for a traveler to count. But joining the army represented a stance, that he would confront the fears that had tormented him for so long, and also presented an opportunity for him to return to the only place that he wished to live: Beit Daras. Repeatedly, Nasser had declared that "what was taken by force, can only be retrieved by force." Mohammed loved Nasser, believed him and believed in him; in some way, he wanted to *become* him. He even wore his military bonnet at an angle that resembled Nasser's. Whenever Mohammed's superiors failed to address what the young soldier deemed an urgent matter,

Mohammed wrote a letter to Nasser. In fact, he wrote many letters, ranging in subject from his political views, as he had many, to strictly military matters. To his amazement, Mohammed was summoned by his superior, and was handed a letter with a military stamp, in the company of an officer who had just arrived from Cairo. It was from Nasser himself, thanking Mohammed for keeping him abreast on the morale of the army in Gaza, and promising that all his concerns would be handled in a timely and efficient manner. The letter turned Mohammed into Nasser's greatest fan in Gaza, and energized the young man like never before. Mohammed joined the army when he was around 19 years old and within a year, he was ranked a corporal, the youngest in his unit. He was also involved in training programs held for fresh recruits. He often bragged about being the fastest in his unit to take apart and reassemble an automatic rifle.

Following every military clash or Israeli army incursion at the Gaza border, Mohammed's father would come running to check on his son. Often, the son would return home just to reassure a distressed father of his safety. Mohammed, who only a few years ago invited ridicule but also pity, was now regarded as a hero. Mohammed's legs and body, once a showcase for the many dog bites that he obtained in his endless journeys in distant nomadic neighborhoods, now were a testimony of his heroism as he received fresh shrapnel wounds. He often rolled up his military khakis to describe in detail every circumstance and encounter surrounding each and every festering wound or scar.

THE FIG TREE

Mohammed's unit was stationed in the central Gaza Strip area, somewhere between the refugee camps of Buraij and Magazzi. The area bordered Israel and was a frequent flashpoint for conflict. But during periods of calm, Mohammed would find himself a quiet corner to read. He was particularly fond of one old fig tree. It was pleasant looking but also shady. He would sit under the tree every day, after the end of his shift, and read for hours into the late evening. His love for Russian literature was clear from the start: *Anna Karenina* and *The Mother* were among his favorites. He would pressure fellow comrades to read from his beloved and tattered volumes, only to argue with them regarding what seemed like a life-shaking question at the time: whose work was more compelling and closer to the truth, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky? He also read the works of other legendary writers, Victor Hugo being one of his greatest loves. A common denominator that united his favorite authors was their intense focus on human suffering. He longed for happy endings, but in the end didn't appreciate them, for he simply found them contrary to reality, or at least his own reality.

But that fig tree had another great significance. In its shadow, he noticed a girl, and swiftly fell in love. He failed to explain the logic of his love at the time. She was there and was very beautiful. Simply dressed like all refugee girls, she was tall and slender, with a soft and fair complexion and hair black as night. But there was something else that drew him to her: her face, with

its innate sadness and loss, reminded him of himself. The moment she would walk past him, he would drop his book and gaze, accompanying her until she disappeared behind a corner or into an alley. She avoided his attentions and looked the other way. He respected her modesty, but was determined to know her name. “I knew from the first moment that we were soul mates,” he once said. Mohammed was in his early twenties when he fell in love for the first time.

6
Zarefah

In 1948, Zarefah was just a toddler. But she vividly remembered "running" as her family fled their beloved village. She could recall taking turns riding on the back of a donkey until they finally reached Buraij refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. Initially, her father, also named Mohammed, a simple and hard-working farmer, refused to leave his home and he fought alongside the men of Beit Daras who did their utmost to hold back the invading army with whatever weapons they could muster: hoes, pickaxes and a few rifles. But when the fight was lost, Mohammed Tayeh insisted on staying to look after his land. He called on his wife, Mariam, to evacuate with the children, a request that was passionately rejected by Mariam who pleaded with her husband to keep the family intact. Zarefah's father was in his early thirties, when he finally resigned himself to leading his family into the life of destitution that awaited them at a Gaza refugee camp. It seems that the moment he walked away from his home, he fell ill. His symptoms were new to the hearty and durable man who had worked the land with his bare hands for years without ever complaining. His health deteriorated as the distance widened between him and Beit Daras. He crawled to the side of the road more than once and asked his wife to carry on without him, refusing to mount the donkey which was the only respite for the little feet of Zarefah and his boys.

Somehow, the family made it to a tent in Gaza, just across the border from the territories that Israel demarcated as its own. Mariam left her children behind and desperately tried to find help for her husband and food for her family, a mission that proved futile. Finding nothing, she ventured into the death zone that separated Israel from Gaza. She was taught the route to some orchards—from which their Palestinian owners were expelled—that offered grapes and figs, and risked her life daily to fetch enough fruit that would feed her children for one more day. Her husband fell into a coma, and nothing could revive him. Mariam returned every day to the same scene awaiting her at the tent: a dying husband, and malnourished kids waiting for their daily ration of figs. She would unfurl her scarf and feed them. The children knew nothing of her journey, of the snipers that awaited her and the other refugees at every turn, of the bloated bodies that dotted the border area. Zarefah believed that her father was just very tired, because he worked very hard and required a long, long sleep. Thus when she was called into the tent, as a group of weeping neighbors surrounded her father's motionless body, and was asked to kiss his cold forehead, she didn't realize that this was her final farewell to her father, and that she was never to see him again.

Mariam was left on her own, widowed in her mid-twenties, penniless, homeless, and a mother of four hungry little ones. Strangely, although poor and illiterate, Mariam held true to her husband's wish to educate their sons. Their tent was eventually replaced by a small mud house and things were looking up. UNRWA had by then moved in to help the refugees, makeshift schools were erected, and Zarefah's brothers, Ali, Hassan and Halim joined thousands of schoolchildren in their new cinderblock schoolhouse. Zarefah stayed behind, abiding by her mother's every instruction. They tended the house together in the morning and then set off to comb border areas in search of metal scraps to sell at the camp's open market in the afternoon. They received their weekly rations of rice, sugar, powdered milk and canned meat provided by UNRWA together, and traded or sold whatever they could live without. This is how they subsisted for years. Mariam was simply thankful that her children were alive.

Zarefah grew up to be a beautiful and confident young woman. Her beauty was natural, but her self-assurance was earned from the hard life that offered the refugees only one option, struggle or perish. She rarely questioned her mother's decision to keep her out of school. Most girls didn't attend school in those days anyway. But she envied her brothers as they diligently inscribed in their neat booklets, filled with lined newsprint and inscribed with the UNRWA emblem on the front cover. She asked her brother to teach her how to write her name. In fact, she carried around a small piece of paper with her name written by one of her brothers. She studied the script religiously, writing her name over and over again in the sand, or on luckier days with a tiny snub of a pencil left behind by one of the boys. She tried to mimic its mesmerizing lines and dots, gushing with pride at the prospect of being literate. But her older brother made a simple error of adding one small dot above one of the characters, which changed her name to "Zarikka." Every attempt at correcting her mistake failed. But she was fond of this version, for she had written it that way for many years. Even as a grown woman with children of her own, I remember fondly sitting with my own UNRWA notebooks as my mother wrote her name again and again down the left margin of the page, bursting with pride just as she had when she was a little girl. It was, as I recall, the only word she ever learned to write. Thus "Zarikka" it was.

Zarefah was a vibrant and lovely young girl on the threshold of womanhood. But in Gaza at the time, such age classifications were of little relevance. Children didn't enjoy a "childhood" with all its leisure and bliss, nor did teenagers take pleasure in the period of mischief and interaction that accompanies coming of age. A parent's mission in life was to protect their children from the imminent indignities and humiliations of life in the refugee camps, and a child's mission was to grow up as quickly as possible. Zarefah was barely 14 years old at the time, but she was already helping her mother raise a family. Zarefah's story was no less tragic than that of Mohammed, but somehow she managed to cope with her circumstances better than he did. Maybe it was her nature as a Palestinian woman, tough and resourceful, or perhaps it was because she was the only daughter in a competition-free family environment,

which helped outline her future in advance, according to a most unfair but predicable pattern. Disregarding the prospects of a formal education, a girl, at the time, was expected to serve her family until she married, usually at a young age, only to serve and dedicate her life to another.

But Zarefah's hardship as a female in an impoverished refugee society was compounded by much more compelling matters, which were unique to her and her family. Zarefah's family, of the surname Tayeh, was, like Mohammed's family, expelled from the same village of Beit Daras. But the similarities between Mohammed and Zarefah's backgrounds exceeded these facts. Both came from small, unimportant families, according to the status chart that governed peasant society in Palestine. More, their families dwelled for a period of time in the same neighborhood of Massriyyen in Beit Daras. They were practically neighbors, but it took a war, and a mass exodus, for their paths to cross.

Zarefah found a job in a textile factory at a very young age, perhaps eight or nine. The factory was run by a group of refugee women. Within months she became a tailor, and when she was twelve years old, she became the supervisor of several women, all of them many years her senior. "Everyone loved me," she'd boast about her time at the factory. "Even though I was the youngest, they didn't mind learning from me and listening to my advice." Mariam was very proud of her daughter, whose meager income managed to fill the gap left wide open by the death of her father.

It was during those trips to the textile factory that Mohammed spotted Zarefah, and eventually offered her a smile. The daring young man went as far as walking by Zarefah's side on her way home and asked her name, an audacious move by the standards of the time. Almost arrogantly but with poise, Zarefah turned to him, saying, "My name is Zarefah, and I come from a respectable family. My father may be dead, but I have a mother, a family and a home. If you were a noble man, you wouldn't approach me in the street, for we have a respected home and an address."

Mohammed was dumbfounded. Zarefah's words put him in his place, he could feel the heat of her reprimand, and he was impressed. Her beauty, confidence and pride won his heart in a moment and he set off to tell his mother of the encounter he had with this young woman. Within a few days, Zeinab, joined by her daughter and a few other relatives, were sipping sweet mint tea at Zarefah's house, seeking the girl's hand for Mohammed. Mariam was torn. On one hand, she needed to bring security to Zarefah's life by finding her a husband, and on the other, Zarefah's income had kept the family afloat for years; without it, the family could not survive. Finally, Mariam came to a decision that would alter the course of Mohammed's life for years. She agreed to an engagement, but not a marriage. Mohammed would have to earn enough money to secure what was considered a healthy dowry to guarantee Zarefah's welfare. Along with a handsome sum of money, Mariam asked for a golden bracelet, a ring and a pair of earrings, which would also serve as a source of financial security for Zarefah. Mohammed was not sure if Mariam's demands

were genuine or if she had presented him with impossible conditions in order to drive him away. But to everyone's astonishment, he agreed.

He agreed, not knowing how he could possibly meet such lofty expectations. The army's income was by no means a source of dowries and gold. His skills were limited, and his family was poor. Like all of his grand ideas, the solution found its way to him beneath the shade of his favorite fig tree: Saudi Arabia. He had heard the many tales of men who traveled to Saudi Arabia seeking their fortune and returning with "riches." The path to his future marriage would only go though Saudi Arabia, he resolved.

After a simple engagement, he placed on Zarefah's finger a cheap copper ring and vowed to replace it with gold as soon as he returned. Zarefah promised to wait for him, and told him that she too loved him, a claim that Mohammed light-heartedly repeated endlessly, and Zarefah vehemently denied.

A SAUDI ESCAPE

Saudi Arabia was a popular destination for Gazans seeking escape, not only from poverty, but also from political persecution from the Nasser regime. At the time, Gaza's politics were dominated by two major forces: those who allied themselves with the Egyptian government, mostly influential individuals representing some of Gaza's largest families, and those who operated outside the sanctioned political apparatus, namely the Muslim Brotherhood and the Communist Party. Communist Party members were largely an educated stratum that was closely affiliated with UNRWA schools, mostly well-read teachers, educated in Egypt, Iraq and with ties to Communist parties around the Middle East, and even the Soviet Union. Their language and ideology was a blend of references to Palestinian exceptionality, regional pan-Arabism and international solidarity with peasants and workers. Gaza was the perfect environment for such rhetoric and organization to flourish, for the bulk of refugees who still referred to themselves as peasants were mostly cheap laborers. Their labor was largely linked to citrus agriculture, construction and military service.

The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Ismailiyya, Egypt, in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna and a few others, but it quickly found in Palestine a rally cry to unite Muslims throughout the entire region. The first link between the movement and Palestine was in 1935, when Abd al-Rahman al-Banna (the founder's brother) visited Palestine and met with the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini. Al-Husseini headed the Higher Islamic Council at the time, and his affiliation with the new movement in Egypt garnered the Brotherhood the needed validation to spread its ideals in Palestine.[1] But the Brotherhood became truly visible during the revolt of 1936, as they communicated the Palestinian message with an Islamic tone and flavor to the rest of the Arab world, using every available outlet, mosques notwithstanding. The cause of Palestine promptly became the central mission and calling of the Brotherhood, as Hasan al-Banna himself headed the newly founded General Central Committee to Aid Palestine, which initially provided

educational and social services, and later helped to locate and facilitate the work of Egyptian and other Arab volunteers, who played a visible role in the Palestinian revolt.[2] Brotherhood activists were sent to Palestine to train Palestinians in the face of the growing Zionist threat, and in April 1948, when most Arab governments delayed in partaking in the defense of Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood deployed three battalions of volunteers. Estimates of the number of Brotherhood volunteers in Palestine during the war and the subsequent Nakba vary, but Hasan al-Banna himself noted, in March 1948, that the movement had approximately 1,500 volunteers in Palestine.[3]

During and after the war, the presence of Brotherhood volunteers or active members of the Egyptian armed forces were most noticeable in Rafah, near the Gaza-Egypt border from Gaza's side, but also in al-Arish and adjacent Sinai towns in Egypt. True, following the war, some Brotherhood members had fled to the West Bank, particularly Hebron, and there, they established movement branches; but it was in Gaza that the daily contacts between ordinary Palestinians, mostly refugees, and Brotherhood soldiers and volunteers took place. These contacts morphed in later decades and proved of enormous significance to the political composition of Gaza. It was only natural for the Muslim Brotherhood to solidify its presence in Gaza by opening a branch there, but when the movement was banned in Egypt in 1949, it was banned in Gaza as well, forcing its followers to operate under the Unification Society, which refrained from overt political activities and focused instead on religious education. But the movement resurfaced, more popular than ever, following Nasser's revolution of 1952 against the monarchy. The return to business as usual in Cairo also meant the reactivation of the movement's work in Gaza and the link between both places.[4]

In the mid 1950s, the special rapport that united Nasser's popular revolution and the Brotherhood's popular appeal unexpectedly broke down. In October 1954, Nasser signed the Evacuation Treaty aimed at ending the presence of British forces in Egypt.[5] The Brotherhood rejected some of the treaty's terms as unfair to Egypt. An attempt on Nasser's life, which was conveniently blamed on the movement, was the last straw. The Brotherhood was banned in Cairo as well as in Gaza. Members of the movement in Gaza operated underground, although they would resurface during times of strife, and would be duly suppressed. In the mass demonstrations that engulfed Gaza in 1955, the Muslim Brotherhood's influence was most apparent. Palestinians protested a proposal to resettle Gaza refugees in Sinai, a proposal that won the initial endorsement of Nasser's government. Public pressure, organized partly by the Muslim Brotherhood, but also by other nationalist movements in Gaza was enough to defeat the proposal.[6] The Brotherhood's role in the resistance to the brief Israeli occupation in 1956, and the mass protests in 1957, which opposed the internationalization of Gaza, made it clear that banning the movement was not enough to ensure its demise.

However, in the period of the early to mid 1960s, pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and in Gaza intensified. Egypt's military defeat of 1956 was interpreted, with good reason, as a "political victory." The war helped

Nasser mature from an Egyptian leader to an icon throughout the Arab world, and his popularity and nationalistic rhetoric overshadowed the Brotherhood and their religious appeal. The Communist Party also paled in comparison to the popularity of the Nasser phenomenon. The Party's willingness to work with the "decent Jews" in Israel during the Israeli occupation of Gaza in 1956 provided ammunition to those who saw Gaza's communists as opportunistic and too morally "flexible."[7]

As members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza were once again forced underground, others were arrested and imprisoned, including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who later became the founder and spiritual leader of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas, whose emergence many years later was understood by some as the resurgence of the long-dormant Brotherhood movement of Gaza. One of the main leaders of the Brotherhood, Abd al-Rahman Baroud (also a refugee from Beit Daras) chose exile in Saudi Arabia, where he served the role of the intellectual and erudite poet for decades afterwards.

Another Baroud was also heading to Saudi Arabia in those days, Mohammed of the Nuseirat refugee camp, whose ultimate objective was to raise a dowry worthy of lovely Zarefah of the Buraij refugee camp. Mohammed was not a member of any political party, although he was particularity impressed with the communists of Gaza. While Nasser's pan-Arabism appealed to Mohammed on one level, the language of the oppressed, presented so eloquently by Mohammed's communist friends and enhanced by his own readings in Russian literature spoke volumes to him. He had long dreamed of a communist utopia during his breaks under the fig tree and genuinely wanted the proletariat of the world to unite, for their unity would surely bring much good to the oppressed masses of Gaza. But for now he had some personal business to attend to.

MECCA ANYONE?

Mohammed's decision to go to Saudi Arabia for work was final. Since his return from Sinai and involvement with the army, all of Mohammed's decisions were final. He was now his own man. His choices would always win the blessings of his father, joined by a few words of caution as well, and that's all that mattered to Mohammed.

To reach Saudi Arabia, Mohammed chose a seemingly odd route. He jumped a train which took him to Sinai, then joined a camel caravan through the desert to a port town on the Red Sea. From there he reached Saudi territories as a stowaway on a ferry. His decision, considering his limited savings, was very logical. The journey was time consuming, exhausting and dangerous, but simply the only option for Mohammed. Once he reached the other side, he had no particular destination. When he was asked by an old Sudanese taxi driver where he was heading, Mohammed thought of the first town that came to mind: "Mecca." Why Mecca? Not even Mohammed could answer this question. Deep down, his Marxist sentiments couldn't drown the spiritual comfort that came with the mention of the sacred city. He was comforted even in speaking the name. Mohammed was hardly religious; in fact, at times

he proudly pronounced that he was a communist, not understanding the full implication of the claim, of course, aside from the fact he was "oppressed" and believed that only a full-fledged "revolution" would be enough to shift Gaza's "modes of production" in the favor of the "working class." It mattered little to Mohammed if such terminology were applicable in the least to Gaza's cultural or economic contexts, but a "communist" he was. However, for now, communist Mohammed was on his way to Mecca. His vision blurred with an unanticipated flood of tears, as Mecca appeared on the horizon. It was a city which still then enjoyed its ancient grandeur and was fitting for the Prophet who was the young refugee's namesake. The driver dropped Mohammed by a crowded area, buzzing with shops, carts, cars, camels and people of every poor race on earth, Arabs, Africans and South-east Asians. They bought, sold, fought, made up, prayed and fellowshipped. Mohammed was at home.

Mohammed's random choice of Mecca might've been his best possible preference, even though he had hardly thought it through. There was so much warmth in the friendly city that Mohammed's early fears of homelessness and starvation quickly dissipated. He was invited to share a warm meal with Ethiopians, drank sweet, dark tea with Somali migrant workers, was given space for prayer on an Indian laborer's prayer rug, and finally a tiny corner to sleep in a small room crowded with Egyptian pilgrims. It was by no means a privileged start, but Mohammed was grateful for the hospitality and considered his successful beginning as a good omen, one which assured a triumphant mission.

On the following day, Mohammed was asked by a kindly old man what skills he had in his possession, so that he might direct him to the proper work venue. Aside from his army skills, Mohammed had none, and Mecca needed no soldiers. Mohammed suggested that he could work as a porter, but the kindly man had an alternative idea, since the majority of the workforce was also working as porters. He handed Mohammed a pair of scissors and advised him to "start small." Mohammed was no barber, nor had the kindly old man expected him to be one. The pilgrimage—the Hajj, or Umra—to Mecca entailed many rituals, some mandatory, and others discretionary. One of these rituals was cutting a snippet of one's hair before embarking on the long journey. Many pilgrims didn't learn of these less-known rituals until they arrived in Mecca, thus hundreds of migrant workers, incapable of finding proper jobs in the crowded city, would line up by the holy grounds of Mecca and offer their services, selling little booklets of basic Hajj or Umra instructions, offering water to parched, unprepared pilgrims, or snapping their scissors as their way of announcing their readiness to help those needing an unforeseen haircut. Mohammed joined the horde of "barbers" who lined up on holy ground, flashing his rusty scissors and quietly announcing his service to throngs of people who seemed oblivious to his presence. Mohammed's timid demeanor didn't fare well with his moneymaking scheme. Rarely did anyone accept his increasingly distressed pronouncements. He was advised by more experienced colleagues to push his way through, to yell as loud as he could, to even cut the locks of pilgrims' hair before asking them if they

even required a cut in the first place. Mohammed could've never imagined himself behaving in such a way, for he was neither pushy nor aggressive. Eventually, he managed to muster up some business, not much, but enough to collect a few riyals.

It was a bad start. Mohammed needed to make much more than the few, and ever unpredictable riyals he earned to pay for his share of a small room, purchase some food and save money for a dowry. He returned the second day, and the third, and the next week and the following, each time more determined than ever to push through the crowds, to rework his language, his style, enough to get more attention, but still, the income was hardly enough to pay for his own expenses. Mohammed needed a different plan. He resorted to what he knew best, considering these exceptional circumstances; he gathered the few riyals that he had collected after two months of work, and bought some knick-knacks and resolved to sell them in some forgotten corners of the city. He chose an area that was used as a campground for Ethiopian pilgrims. Many of them came to the city as pilgrims and chose to stay longer, and if they could, permanently. The area was, like the rest of the city, crowded, and was mostly made up of provisional structures, tents, and such. It also had a crude market, visited mostly by women of Ethiopian, Somali and other African origins of, more or less, similar proximity to Saudi Arabia.

Mohammed was handsome and his polite demeanor often proved valuable in such times, and he hesitated not to exploit it. He sat behind a small cart, of two large wheels and two handles that he had borrowed for the day, and on top of which he stacked his goods ever so neatly. That was Mohammed's first winning move in Saudi Arabia. The handsome, young pedlar to the African market was the darling of the ladies, who bought his knick-knacks with little bargaining, to his utter delight. The next day he returned with twice as many goods, and this time the cart was his own. The lucky streak continued, for days and weeks, and Mohammed's cart was one of the most loaded with everything that a poor Ethiopian woman dwelling in a tent in Mecca would ever need: towels, undergarments, creams and lotions and a few Egyptian perfumes, the "genuine" kind, not the "cheap imitation," he would boast.

One day, a large lady, probably in her forties, approached Mohammed, complaining of her many ailments as if Mohammed were a learned physician. She had a terrible headache, she said, nightly fevers and unbearable joint pain. "I would do anything to feel better," she said. Amazingly, Mohammed knew of the poor lady's exact sickness and, equally astounding, he had the very cure. To assure her that he was not a "quack," he repeated the exact symptoms she had just detailed and thoroughly so. She nodded her head in admiration. "I swear by Allah that you speak truth," she agreed in a broken voice and equally broken Arabic. Of course, Mohammed's magic cure was nothing but a cheap ointment. He instructed the women, in so solemn a voice to go home, slather herself with the ointment, wrap herself up with two chunky blankets and go to sleep. "In the morning," he promised, "you shall be healed." The woman ran home, anxious to follow the prescription to the letter, not minding the fact

that swaddling oneself with two thick blankets, all night, in Saudi Arabia's scorching heat was a most foolish prescription, to say the least.

The next day, Mohammed had completely forgotten about the woman, a meeting he brushed off as a silly encounter, until she showed up at the market, frantically looking for him. "When I saw her, I thought I was dead," he once said. But the woman didn't tear Mohammed to pieces, as he thought she would. When she located him, she showered him with kisses, hugs and tears. "Last night I thought I was going to die, but I woke up this morning feeling as strong as a horse," she proclaimed. She gave him more money, and promised to direct her friends to his cart, for he was more than a salesman, but a learned man of wisdom, a holy man. Mohammed, of course, didn't mind the new title, and learned to live with it as he learned to live with his long-revered title of Qur'an scholar in al-Arish, some years ago. Of course, Mohammed's magic potion became the primary item on his cart, no longer the "genuine" Egyptian perfume. He prescribed it for nearly every ailment, ranging from headache and cold, to diarrhea to, yes, even ladies with problems conceiving.

A few months later, when Mohammed's sacred lotion was losing its appeal, he decided to move to Jeddah. If he was not to have similar success there, he planned to continue his journey back to Egypt, through the Red Sea and finally home. But in Jeddah, he found a job at an American family's home. John and Patricia had two children and a dog named Rex. That's all that Mohammed learned of his new employees, who had relocated to Jeddah as growing American involvement in pursuit of oil exploration swamped the country. John was most likely an engineer, but Mohammed couldn't confirm that. All he could recall was that the family was very kind to him, paid him a fair wage, gave him new clothes and snapped many pictures of him. In return, he did all sorts of odd jobs, cleaning, gardening, and more. They even taught him a few English words and phrases. He even claimed to have, at one point, "spoken fluent English," as he spent a year in John and Patricia's home. But he could never substantiate his claim, for all he could remember were the words "because," "school" and a few others. When confronted with his poor English skills, he bragged that no one could spell "school" as fast as he could. He was probably right. For many years, he treasured his memories with the American family in Jeddah, and he held on to those photos for many years. One photo was of him petting Rex. He looked so relaxed and had a wide smile on his face. On the back of the photo, which he intended to send to Zarefah, he wrote, "me and Rex, my best friend." But alas, sweet Zarefah could not read.

Between his stays in Mecca and Jeddah, Mohammed was away nearly three years. There was no way for him to communicate with his family or his fiancée. Therefore it was no surprise that when Mohammed finally showed up on Zarefah's family's doorstep in the Buraij refugee camp, wearing a silky white shirt and white pants—a parting gift from John and Patricia—Zarefah burst into tears. She hardly knew Mohammed, but his disappearance for three years for her sake was enough to transform the irritating solider under the fig tree

into the man of her dreams. But as she was entering her eighteenth year of age, her mother was pressuring her intensely to marry another man who was twice her age, a man already married with children. "You are growing old, and it's better to have a bird in the hand than ten on a tree," her mother incessantly reminded her, invoking the same aged Arabic proverb, tirelessly. Just when Zarefah was ready to give in to her mother's demands, Mohammed showed up, as handsome as ever, loaded with exotic presents but most importantly a golden ring, the "genuine" kind, not a "cheap imitation." This time, he was not lying.

INTERNATIONAL BRIDE

Zarefah's mother was still suspicious of Mohammed, but a promise is a promise, and Zarefah was, at 18, getting "old"; if she waited any longer, she risked missing the "marriage train." Mohammed had more than he needed for a dowry. He bought Zarefah a white dress, sunglasses and a handbag. He had enough money left to rent a room, adjacent to some house, neighboring his family's home in Nuseirat. He bought a used mattress, a used cupboard, a kerosene lamp, and a few kitchen wares.

In a refugee camp, a wedding is a most happy occasion for the entire community. Rarely do the refugees gather with such enthusiasm and joy, amid song and dance, and piles of couscous and baklava. Indeed, Mohammed and Zarefah's wedding was most memorable. Women gathered from near and far to get a glimpse of the lovely young bride, who took center stage in her mother's house. The *zaffah*, or wedding parade, crossed one refugee camp into another, amid celebration and song and joined by hundreds of refugees. Zarefah wore her white gown, which Mohammed had purchased in Egypt, and, naturally, wore the sunglasses, throughout the entire ceremony, even in shade and throughout the evening's celebrations. During the procession to Mohammed's neighborhood, flocks of little children chased after Zarefah, chanting "the bride is international, the bride is international." This reference was of course to her sunglasses, an item that was introduced to Gaza by international aid workers and forces that made a brief appearance in Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal at the end of the 1956 war. Zarefah took so much pride in that designation and held on her sunglasses for years until they mysteriously disappeared. Soon, however, Mohammed ran out of money and needed a job, but Gaza had little to offer.

SELF-AWARENESS

The only thriving industry in Gaza at the time was the higher purchasing power of a proportion of the refugees, fuelled by remunerations flowing in from the thousands of Palestinians who'd gone to the Arab Gulf countries for more lucrative employment in the prosperous oil states. Gaza's access to a relatively good education in Egyptian universities, combined with the Gulf States' need for teachers and doctors and other professions, made Palestinians

most suitable candidates. The latter had also limited options, and thus working under difficult or even unfair conditions was still regarded as an acceptable escape from Gaza's hopeless economy. The first generation of Palestinian workers in the Gulf had affected Gaza's economic and political makeup in more ways than one. On the one hand, they financially empowered their struggling families at home. On the other, they empowered the community as a collective, for they represented a worldly, educated and, to a degree, financially comfortable segment of society. But there was also other implications resulting from the sudden wealth: a merchant class was growing richer in Gaza, and a class society, relatively alien to the impoverished region, was becoming more noticeable.

Palestinians in Gaza, although still committed to Nasser's pan-Arabism, were also becoming more aware of themselves as exclusively Palestinian. True, Palestinian nationalism dates back to the early twentieth, if not late nineteenth century, but rarely were Palestinians able to express their national identity through a uniquely independent leadership that embodied a truly independent initiative. In the first half of the 1960s, that realization was pressing Palestinian leaders to move away from Egyptian and Jordanian dominance. In fact, the national and religious movements that sprung forth in Gaza, independent of Nasser's political constructs, were a raw expression of that need. Perhaps they were ideologically connected to other parties regionally and internationally, but their behavior largely represented a unique reading of their own history and national expectations. These movements, aside from Gaza's Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood, also included the Baath Party, the Arab Nationalist movement and, later, the Fatah movement.

In 1962, a constitutional system of governance was introduced that divided responsibility between the legislative branch, mostly elected Palestinians, and the executive branch, mostly appointed Egyptians and influential Gazans, whose "decisions" were more or less made in Cairo.[8] The Egyptian governor of Gaza had all the decision-making power and enjoyed a veto right over any legislative bill that Palestinians pushed to turn into law. In 1964–65, under pressure from the rising sense of Palestinian nationalism, emboldened factions and mass mobilization, the constitution was altered to reflect greater Palestinian control.[9] Nonetheless, Egypt continued to have the ultimate say over Gaza's affairs.

In January 1964, Arab leaders met in Cairo and called for that very "independent" Palestinian body that would speak for itself and articulate its own people's demands. Eager to seize the moment, Palestinian factions, community leaders and intellectuals strove to bring such a body into existence. In May 1964, over 400 Palestinian national figures congregated in Jerusalem, under the patronage of the Nasser government, in the first meeting of the Palestine National Congress (PNC), and announced the birth of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).[10] They drew up a National Charter, where they called for a unified Palestine, to be liberated through armed struggle, and under the banner of pan-Arabism. "Palestine with its boundaries that existed at the time of the British mandate is an integral regional unity," read

the original charter, in part.[11] Ahmad al-Shuqairi was the first chairman of the PLO and its executive committee, a smaller body elected by the PNC. Electing al-Shuqairi was a fitting compromise, since, on one hand, he was highly respected and influential amongst Palestinians, and on the other, he had served as an assistant Secretary General of the Arab League (1950–56) and was trusted by Cairo as well.[12] In September 1964, the Arab League met again, this time in Alexandria, confirming the role of the PLO, but also calling for the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA).[13] Both bodies were to receive their funding from contributions made by Arab countries. Moreover, Gaza was chosen to host both groups' political and military headquarters: the PLO's government in exile, but also one of the PLA's military branches, known as Ayn Jalut.[14] The other two military wings of the PLA, Qadisiyyah was originally based in Iraq and was later moved to Jordan, and Hattin, was based in Syria. All three military units carried the names of notable historic military battles, in which Arabs claimed decisive victory. The PLA, however, was not to have similar successes.

The abrupt establishment of several Palestinian national bodies (PNC, PLO, PLA and more) all within one year, then placing their most important institutions in Gaza, granted the Strip, already abuzz with all sorts of political and military activities, an added import. Gaza was still tiny in geographic standards, but most consequential in geopolitical terms. Palestinians in Gaza were also changing in terms of their comprehension of their worth, coming to regard themselves not merely as desperate refugees representing a "refugee problem," but as active players in their own national destiny. Gaza's refugees in particular were now becoming the core of an officially formulated national consciousness.

Mohammed too was trying to articulate the terms of his own existence, although without the needed tools or resources to fully express who he was or whom he wanted to be. His poverty was then absolute and crippling, and his marriage was turning into an unreservedly humiliating experience, for, as his mother-in-law feared, he struggled to provide even the basics for his wife. Mohammed and Zarefah subsisted on dry bread dipped in tea that had been boiled again and again. Even by Gaza's standards, he was terribly poor.

The family insisted that Mohammed was old enough to support himself and his wife, but, like many in his generation, he couldn't dream of furthering his education. His personal history, dotted with disappointments, was now compounded by new failures.

When the PLA was established with one of its units based in Gaza, Mohammed was called back to arms. His dream of returning to his village in Palestine was still alive, although it seemed less practical and achievable than during his first service in the Egyptian army in Gaza. He was by then an avid reader and an articulate self-taught intellectual, whose language was often mistaken for that of an "UNRWA teacher" or even a "Palestinian from the Gulf." His rhetoric however lacked the haughtiness of the "Gulf snobs," as he called them, although he was tacitly pleased with the reference. Reading for Mohammed was a great joy. He didn't have a specific purpose or an

end in mind as he read, sipped blackened tea, smoked, coughed and then read some more. Reading was, like other things, an escape, an attempt at balancing his self-worth, which was suspended between his barren reality and impressive scholarly capacity. The self-taught man was becoming an imposing radical intellectual, whose knowledge resulted in little cash but garnered him a sizable following at Nuseirat refugee camp's coffee shops. His friends, also penniless like him, were cynical and polemic. Unlike Ahmad, who was acclaimed a "genius" among the educated elites of Gaza, Mohammed was approachable. For some, Mohammed was a unique spectacle; a young man without formal education who was capable of comparing and contrasting, if not critiquing, Islamic and Western (including Marxist), thoughts and philosophies. "I was one of the first in Gaza to argue that Rene Descartes had borrowed heavily from al-Ghazali but lacked the intellectual audacity to admit it," he boasted, repeatedly.

It made perfect sense for Mohammed to join the PLA when he was called to sign up for Gaza's brigade. He needed the meager income on offer, and joining an exclusively Palestinian liberation army was by no means a humiliation. But more importantly, the establishment of the PLA represented a ray of hope that Arab rhetoric was maybe finally translating, based on what was seen as a Palestinian not Egyptian initiative, into an actual plan for liberation. Mohammed was expected to report to his new unit on a specific day with a few basic supplies, a shaving kit, two white towels, clean socks and other mandated items for personal use. The supplies needed money, and he had none. Both he and Zarefah anxiously looked for someone to lend them the money. They were already in debt to several shops. Their futile hunt ended with Zarefah's decision to sell her golden wedding ring, all that was left of what Mohammed had given her as her dowry. She wept bitterly as she hurried home from the market after she sold the ring, and tightly clutching a few Egyptian pounds, far less than the market price of the ring, for it was "genuine," not the "cheap imitation."

AWDA, AWDA, AWDA

Despite his asthma and skeletal physique, Mohammed was once again a fighter, this time in a Palestinian army. But Mohammed had yet another reason to defend Gaza, not only for the sake of Gaza, Zarefah's and his own, but also for that of Suma as well, his first born. Her birth brought both joy and dread to her parents; Zarefah's first meal after delivering the baby in her rented room was a bowl of garlic soup, contributed by a kindly but equally poor neighbor lady. Other women took shifts looking after the pale mother, and spared some of their food to feed her. Zarefah could hardly produce any milk, but Suma blossomed nonetheless, and her happy chatter often distracted the young couple from their many worries. On his first day of duty, Mohammed held his wife and softly kissed a sleeping Suma, and on a cold Gaza dawn, he reported to his unit, somewhere in the southern Gaza Strip.

The establishment of the PLA, despite its political underpinnings, implanted hope among Gaza's inhabitants, especially the refugees amongst them. After nearly two decades in refugee camps, in time they grew to believe in armed struggle as the only way to liberation and return. Israel had stolen Palestine through military force, and Palestine could only be retrieved through military force. This was not only a mantra, but the everyday question that Palestinians in Gaza argued about. Indeed, Gaza in the immediate years and months preceding the 1967 war, especially following the founding of the PLO and later the PLA, was busy preparing for an imminent military confrontation with Israel, one they believed that Israel would soon instigate. The PLA was not yet an army in the procedural sense, but it was a promising start in the eyes of many. Thousands of Palestinian men like Mohammed joined; military training became compulsory for all able-bodied Palestinians in Gaza, and a personal ID card couldn't be obtained without proof of military service. Gaza was being militarized, and passionately so. The Israeli invasion of 1956 was still fresh in the minds of most Gazans, and there was a collective determination not to repeat the travesty of that war. The dispossession of 1948 was also a raw memory. Gaza's refugees flocked to training camps throughout the Gaza Strip. Nasser promised them and all Arabs a decisive victory, and Palestinians were eager for a victory of their own.

Mohammed required little training, and shortly after rejoining the army was responsible for the training of new recruits. His visits home were becoming sparse, an ominous sign of the war to come. Morale was high, and he would tell Zarefah such whenever he managed to sneak in a short visit, and entrust to her whatever money he received from the army. The PLA was the pride of Gaza, and Mohammed was no ordinary soldier. He was a veteran.

Gazans, save the cynical amongst them, truly perceived the PLA as an independent army, politically and militarily, with an equal status to any other Arab fighting force. The PLO's Ahmad al-Shuqairi's frequent tours in Gaza, his passionate speeches accompanying the graduation of new recruits, and his appearances side by side with Egyptian army officials, assuring full preparedness and promising victory, all helped instill the idea that the coming war was unquestionably different from past ones.[15] But Mohammed was anxious about Zarefah's safety and that of his daughter. He devised many contingency plans in case of war. The notion of having his wife and daughter stay at his mother-in-law's was quickly discounted, for Buraij refugee camp was located right on the border with Israel. It made more sense for Mariam to join Zarefah in the supposedly safer Nuseirat refugee camp. But what would happen when Nuseirat itself fell? Zarefah was directed to take Suma to the large orchard by the beach and hide until the Israelis were driven back. But what if they were not driven back? He simply couldn't ponder such bleak scenarios.

At times Mohammed convinced himself that victory was very much possible, despite the many worrisome signs that he had observed during his service: hyped rhetoric, lack of preparedness, a confused chain of command. The Voice of Arab Radio never tired of conveying the same message that "the Arabs will

triumph and that the oppressors will be crushed." Mohammed would go to sleep every night to the sound of Nasser's speeches, and would spend most of his day between training camps and trenches. Recruits would repeat after him, as they would jump through hoops, climb walls and hop through tires, "Awda, Awda, Awda": "return, return, return." Oh, how they all longed to return to their homes and land in Palestine.[16]

Gaza however was not yet the main center of Palestinian armed struggle. The PLO's armed struggle was launched mostly from its bases in Syria and Jordan. Israel too launched frequent assaults against these territories, carrying out massive and bloody raids. In one assault against the village of Sammu near Hebron, 18 Jordanian soldiers were killed and 125 homes were blown up in one single raid.[17] Israel was not merely carrying out disproportionate attacks, but Zionist forces were testing the resolve and readiness of its refugee adversary. The PLO hadn't yet utilized Gaza's ground for resistance strikes against Israel, for such a move would complicate the unstable relationship between Egypt and the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), which still monitored the Gaza-Egypt border area. Some accused Nasser of failing to back his heated rhetoric with enough action, if any at all. Jordan was one such detractor.

In the early months of 1967, Soviet intelligence confirmed Syria's and Egypt's own estimation that Israel was preparing for a major attack on Syria. Under immense pressure, Nasser understood that his great oratory must translate into action, strong enough to send a message to Israel that the Arabs too were prepared for war. He asked UNEF to withdraw some of its units between Sinai and Israel (but not units stationed in Sharm al-Sheikh.) The international force insisted that a withdrawal would have to include all of its forces stationed in Sinai. Nasser obliged.[18] Egyptian forces quickly deployed in UNEF's place. On May 25, Nasser declared his country's intent to block the Strait of Tiran, leading to the Gulf of Aqaba. War was all but a matter of time. Soon enough, on June 5, Israel launched a massive "preemptive" aerial attack against Egypt, and moved in force against the West Bank, Jordan and Syria. Israeli warplanes attacked all of Egypt's 17 airbases, and within hours, most of the country's air force was obliterated. The war's outcome, at least in the case of Egypt, was determined before any real combat had begun. The Egyptian army was exposed in the naked desert. In a moment, a generation's hope for freedom, return and victory was completely dashed, preemptively pulverized.

As Arab armies desperately fought back against encroaching Israeli forces by air, land and sea, Israel was determined to expand its territorial control throughout the region. Gaza, once a breeding ground for hope and a long-awaited victory, was now a killing field. PLA units lost all communication with their Sinai and Egypt superiors and desperately fought using light arms and pistols, joined by male civilians who trained for many months in preparation for such an encounter. But the battle was as unpromising as that of 1948, and contrasted with the war of 1956 was not likely to

yield any "political victory." Egyptian soldiers, mostly from poor villages and crowded urban areas, inspired by Nasser's revolutionary language and promises of equality, fought and fell in droves. Many were killed, many were captured and the rest fled into the open desert, only to be gunned down by the Israeli air force that roamed Sinai uncontested. The bitter fighting on the outskirts of Gaza was soon concluded with utter defeat. Palestinians in Gaza continued the same tradition of facing tanks with bare chests and worthless pistols, civilians running away from falling shells and whizzing bullets, all to no avail. There was nowhere to run but the sea, the desert and Israel, and all were equally lethal. Zarefah left her daughter at her mother's house and went running south, defying Mohammed's clear instructions. She knew that he was stationed somewhere in the southern part of the Strip, but had never visited his camp. Mohammed ran out of bullets and expectations that a victory, any victory was possible. He went running north, back to Zarefah and Suma. Both Mohammed and Zarefah seemed to be heading in the opposite direction of a flood of panic-stricken civilians and soldiers, and into the eye of the storm. But soon Mohammed's unit was clearing out, heading towards Sinai. Eventually, Mohammed was shoved by his comrades into a truck that also took the Sinai route, and Zarefah finally headed to the orchard by the beach, as she was originally told, without her husband or her daughter.

BOOTS AND WAVES

Mohammed was barefoot. His army boots were too heavy and his toes blistered and bled. His legs were wounded from shrapnel, yet somehow he felt no pain. He watched the blood slowly flowing from his wounds and did nothing. The air smelled of blood and salt. The dilapidated army truck that carried Mohammed across the desert was now an all-purpose vehicle, transporting living wounded, but mostly dead, soldiers. Those killed, Palestinian and Egyptian, were piled atop one another in no specific order. Some of the wounded were quietly uttering Qur'anic verses, those that one would recite before their last breath. The truck sped through Sinai, which was no longer barren, for it was speckled with burnt vehicles, scattered bodies, and boots. There were so many boots, the exact same kind that Mohammed still held between his arms. They filled the desert like uprooted trees, and around them were barefooted men, lying still.

Zarefah reached the orchard, by no means a proper shelter. Thousands like her set up makeshift camps under the orange and lemon trees. The distance to the beach was not as far as she had anticipated. Gaza is so small and for those running in fright, it seemed even smaller. Shells showered the small strip and their menacing voices made Zarefah jump. She sought a small clearing between the trees to gaze at the waves crashing down on Gaza's sandy beach. They were beautiful and inviting and the day was sunny. The beach was her family's only affordable escape. Mohammed would carry Suma on his

shoulders and would run as Zarefah would pretend to chase after them. Suma was her happiest at the beach, right beside the refugee camp. But the scene was soon cluttered by Israeli tanks that descended on the road separating Nuseirat's orchards and the beach. Frightened refugees fled in horror. Zarefah fell on her knees, closed her eyes, clasped her hands on her ears, lowered her face to the ground and wept. Others screamed. Bullets flew, and bodies fell. But the trees remained standing.

7
Al-Naksa: The Setback

There was nothing about the crushing defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war that could have been said to explain to Mohammad and Zarefah, and so many like them that a defeat of such mortifying proportions was rational. How could the trusting millions—who fed on rhetoric and enthusiastically signed up to defend their land in the ultimate battle—ever know that Israel was more than prepared to take on several Arab armies, who were not qualified to launch or withstand a major military showdown? How could Mohammed ever know, as he busily ran through discarded tires and jumped through hoops, chanting "return, return, return," that Israel had been arming itself with American HAWK missiles, West German Patton battle tanks and French Mirage fighter jets[1] and that his unit, armed with discarded Soviet rifles, didn't stand a chance? How could they have ever predicted that American intelligence was to guide Israel's every military move, enough to bring about the demise of the Arabs in a most degrading fashion? It is ironic how the Arabs, who once admired the US for taking a strong stance against Israel and its Western allies during the 1956 crisis, came to recognize the US as the real enemy only a few years later. As far as the US was concerned, robust Israel, a country not even two decades old, had become the only party in the region that truly mattered. It was the war of 1967 that chiefly inspired the "special relationship" that continues to bind together Israel and the United States, even today.

The 1948 war was hardly acknowledged, at least from a Palestinian viewpoint, as a true military confrontation, in the full sense of the term. It was a massive attack on an unarmed civilian population who had no army, and who had suffered a violent expulsion and mass exodus. Conventional war activities took place primarily after Israel had taken control of much of Palestine, and had expelled hundreds of thousands of its people. Arab armies that later intervened were commanded by unpopular, spurious leaderships, whose decisions were hardly their own. True, that didn't stop Israel from boasting of its "miraculous" birth and "divine" victory over the Arabs, but Palestinians, Gazans included, knew well that this was hardly a genuine war. Attempts at resistance were sincere at times, hollow at others. Even the military defeat in the 1956 tri-partite aggression on Egypt was somewhat forgivable. Egypt's young revolutionary government was hardly in a position that would allow it to defeat three major powers simultaneously. The fact that Britain, France and Israel failed to accomplish the objective of their mission—controlling Sinai and the Suez Canal, among others—and their subsequent withdrawal, thanks to US pressure, was all the "victory" that

Egypt, and the Arabs behind it, could have possibly hoped for. But what could be said of the resounding defeat of 1967?

Historians theorize and deconstruct; they speak of Israel's clear military advantage at the time, superior intelligence, Egyptian military inability to fight a major war, the Soviet's reluctant support of the Arabs, as opposed to the unqualified US-Western backing of Israel, and all the rest.

On the morning of June 5, the entire Egyptian air force was destroyed, its entire fleet still sitting on the tarmac. Within the next 24 hours, the air forces of Jordan and Syria were also pounded. By June 7, Jordan had ceded Jerusalem, and the rest of the West Bank.[2] By June 10, Israel had captured the Gaza Strip and the entire Sinai Peninsula to the Suez Canal and down to Sharm el-Sheikh. Syria was forced to concede its strategically and economically prized Golan Heights. Within days, Israel had occupied three times more territory than it had post-1948, if not even more. Other statistics were equally staggering. Israel had lost 766 soldiers, while, between the dead and the wounded, the Arabs had lost tens of thousands of troops and civilians. Egypt alone lost more than 10,000 soldiers and Jordan, much smaller in size and population, over 6,000.[3] Demographic realities were fundamentally altered, as all of historic Palestine fell under Israeli control, and the Jewish state dominated four times as many Palestinians, a mix of previously and newly occupied people and Occupied Territories. In the West Bank, many villages were forcefully evacuated; new lines demarcated freshly designated security zones, buffer belts, and so on. Hundreds of thousands of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians instantly became refugees in Jordan, Egypt and, subsequently, other countries. But 600,000 remained in the West Bank, and 300,000 more in Gaza.[4] The Israeli army reigned supreme and uncontested. The Arabs were defeated, not just in the material sense, but psychologically as well. What happened in June 1967 was not just a Second Nakba, or "Catastrophe," but a Naksa as well, meaning a great "Setback." The term was not randomly coined, for it expressed the collective sense of complete dismay and disillusionment that permeated Arab peoples' consciousness at the time.

But the lasting outcome of the defeat was much more profound than charts and figures indicate, even those marking territorial losses, casualties and refugees. Humiliation cannot be articulated by statistics. Reflecting on those days, Mohammed said that those who lost their lives had to suffer death for just a short while, but those who witnessed all of that horror, and yet lived, were truly the wretched ones.

RUNNING

Mohammed coughed uncontrollably in a concerted effort for every breath he took, as an army truck hauled him across the Sinai Desert. The numbers of surviving soldiers accompanying Mohammed on his journey to the other side of the Suez Canal was dwindling. Israeli warplanes circulated overhead and scrupulously picked off one moving vehicle after another. The truck driver maneuvered, driving in circles at times, and then bringing his truck to

a complete halt at others, then resuming the journey again, all in a desperate effort to escape the bombs that fell like rain in the desert. Mohammed could not remember how or when the truck reached the Suez Canal. But he could recall running into the water, dragging a friend long dead, a fellow fighter from Gaza, as if crossing the Canal to a point of imaginary safety would bring his comrade back to life. A makeshift ferry, perhaps a piece of a blown-up mobile army bridge, hauled him towards the other side with other soldiers who gazed anxiously at the sky, hoping to cross over before the warplanes returned. Once they completed their crossing, they resumed running, for the bombs knew no boundaries. Soon after, Mohammed was united with a few surviving soldiers from his Gaza unit. They were shipped to Cairo, and Mohammed, eventually, to a military hospital.

Zarefah, on the other hand, waited among the trees. She could only hear the sounds of bombs and bullets, near and far. She convinced herself that it was just a matter of time before Mohammed would arrive and take her home, but not before a quick stop at her mother's home to fetch little Suma. On the way, she planned to tell Mohammed all about the most frightening day and night of her life, after chastising him, of course, for not coming to her rescue sooner—and he was going to tell her how the Israeli army took them by surprise, but were ultimately routed out. But what Zarefah didn't know is that Mohammed was far, far away, in an Egyptian hospital, and that the nightmare of occupation was just commencing, and that thousands were already slaughtered on many fronts, and that dozens of Gazan men were being executed, and that Gaza was under the mercy of an army that lacked any such understanding of the notion of mercy. Worse, she didn't realize that she was pregnant. She slept under a tree, resting against its sturdy trunk, with her legs curled up and her head resting on her knees. She was all alone and she was afraid. She woke up to a violent commotion, noises, partly made in a foreign language with which she was not familiar. The voices drew near; they were abrasive and commanding, interrupted or joined by screams, submissive words pleading in Arabic: "for God's sake, don't take him, he is only a child," "I swear by Allah, soldier, my son has never hurt anyone," "please spare him, and may you return safe and sound to your own mother." Such exchanges would soon end with a hail of bullets, then silence, then more screams, and shouts in a language with which Zarefah was hardly familiar. But soon after, the commands were loud and clear, barking in a strange, but comprehensible Arabic accent through a loudspeaker: "To all of those hiding in the orchard, come out with your hands on your heads. Those who violate the army's order will be shot at once." Hundreds like her—mothers with their children, old men and women—all began moving in one direction, some quietly whimpering, others in complete silence. Once the crowd emerged from behind the trees, Zarefah came face to face with the Israeli soldiers. They were positioned around their tanks and behind their jeeps; they blocked all directions to the orchard and gave orders using loudspeakers. The frightened refugees were eventually rounded up in a circle. Men and women were separated. Men were shackled, and women were ordered to run, as bullets were fired at and around

their feet. Zarefah ran. All she could think of was Suma and what her little girl would do without her. She ran in the direction of her mother's house, forced to take back routes when Israeli tanks emerged, seemingly from everywhere. She would hide in alleyways and wait for the tanks to pass, then she would resume running, oblivious to the fact that she was actually running closer and closer to the menace. She saw small groups of men dashing from one street corner to another, some clutching old rifles, others with bloodied PLA uniforms. The resistance hardly looked promising. She thought of Mohammed and felt overwhelmed by the mere thought: what were the chances that he was not killed or captured? She reached her mother's house and hysterically pounded on the door, "Mother, open the door, the tanks are coming!" Her mother opened the door following a brief moment of excitement and panic. Mariam was tired, her eyes bloodshot. Zarefah hardly noticed her. She flew past her mother and ran frantically around the house, looking for Suma. The child was in her cradle, sleeping soundly and clutching a homemade rag-doll that Zarefah had made for her. Only then could Zarefah feel the weight of the world coming down on her shoulders, all at once. "I think Mohammed is dead," she wailed, before falling into her mother's arms.

INVINCIBLE

So much fell away during those short, but painful days of war: old legends died, and new myths were born. And because Israel's victory was complete, Israel had the opportunity to produce new stories in their entirety, leaving little room for the retreating Arab armies, the proud or cowering regimes, to describe much, save the extent of the humiliation and the magnitude of the infamy. Nasserism came to an abrupt end.[5] Nasser himself resigned with a heart-wrenching farewell message that reduced the multitudes of poor, once hopeful Arabs to tears. Millions of Egyptians, feeling the loss of hope and direction, took to the streets, demanding their leader's return. In response to their pleas, he did return, but only to rule over a disgraced reality, not that of revolution and hope, but a futile attempt at introspection. The backbone of Pan-Arab nationalism, which had been centered in Cairo, suddenly crumbled, and the appeal of the once-promising experience was forcefully diminished. Egypt emerged from the war bloodied and dishonored with a much more limited vision of nationalism. The challenge was no longer unifying the Arabs around the idea of fighting imperialism and recovering historic Palestine; Egypt was self-absorbed in the task of recapturing its own occupied territories.

In Israel, and around the world, Jewish nationalism took on a new meaning. Israel's "Invincible Army" was born, and even cynical Jews began to view Israel differently, as a victorious state; what was once viewed as an impulsive colonial gambit, was now a regional, if not international force to be reckoned with:

> The Occupation of Sinai, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza … and the destruction of the combined armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan,

> thrilled most Israelis and encouraged many of them to develop an imperial outlook and to embrace an imperialist project based on a conviction that their state was the strongest army force in the Middle East. The same expansionist instincts helped to sanctify the Zionist principal that "never again should Eretz-Yisrael be divided."[6]

In fact, it was argued that following the Israeli victory in 1967, the concept of imperial expansion, and the rejection of the "division" of Eretz-Yisrael became a "most energetic and influential tenet in modern Zionism."[7] Regardless of whether Israel fully anticipated such massive territorial expansion or not, the country seemed determined to quickly fortify its gains, rebuffing any call for a return to the armistice lines of 1949, as was demanded by the Soviet Union and others.[8] Although religious Jews were intoxicated by the idea that biblical Judea, Samaria and Gaza had been "returned" to its long-estranged owners, the first movement to capitalize on the territorial gains was a secular elite organization: the Whole Land of Israel (WLIM).[9] The official founding conference of the WLIM was held shortly after Israel's victory. Although founded and dominated by Labor party activists, the WLIM cut across party lines and ideological divides, all united in their determination to preserve the whole of Palestine, as the whole of Israel. As for the unwanted population, those who were not expelled were to be subdued. And as Egypt and other Arab countries decried their ill-fated war, Palestine was completely taken over, making many Palestinians captives in their own land. Just as Israel celebrated its victory over official Arab armies, Israeli soldiers filmed themselves, grinning and flashing victory signs at the "Western Wall," as well as in and around Arab Jerusalem's holy sites. Indeed, "it was the moment in Palestinian history most bereft of hope."[10] Palestinian refugees who dreamed of returning to pre-1948 Palestine were facing a momentous setback, a new Nakba, indeed, for the refugee problem was now exasperated and compounded by the war and the creation of 400,000 new refugees.[11] Israeli bulldozers promptly moved into many parts of the newly conquered Palestinian territories—as they did in other occupied Arab lands—demolishing historic realities, and constructing new ones, an endeavor that continues up to the present day.

FATAH ON THE RISE

The political landscape in Gaza was violently disrupted by the war's outcome. Those who had found in Nasser a trustworthy ally were left with no one, and those who had opposed Nasser were already browbeaten by their confrontations with his regime. Now they were to face a new task for which they were sorely unprepared. The war of 1967 was an end of an era for some, true, but also an opportunity of many prospects for others. The PLO, with its old structure that sought shelter in Nasser and his pan-Arab agenda, was greatly weakened. A relatively new movement, Fatah, was about to claim the leadership of the PLO and the Palestinian people. But Fatah was not entirely a new faction. It had existed, in one form or another since Yasser

Arafat, a successful engineer in Kuwait, called for a meeting of a group of Palestinian intellectuals and activists, mostly refugees, in October 1959.[12] Fatah, as claimed by its founders, was modeled after the Algerian resistance. Despite the French colonialists' awesome military arsenal, in comparison to the minuscule firepower of Algeria's liberation groups, the latter managed to strike the French repeatedly. Fatah's founders were impressed with the idea that revolutionary armed struggle had a chance for success, especially as conventional armies had failed:

> It was not only the experiences and the errors of our predecessors which helped guide our first steps. The guerrilla war in Algeria, launched five years before the creation of Fatah, had a profound influence on us. We were impressed by the Algerian nationalists' ability to form a solid front, wage war against an army a thousand times superior to their own, obtain many forms of aid from various Arab governments, and at the same time avoid becoming dependent on any of them. They symbolize the success we dreamed of.[13]

Fatah founders recognized the ills that permeated the Palestinian leadership and repeatedly decried its total reliance on Arab regimes, which had other pressing priorities, aside from Palestine and its people. The movement was a mix of ideas, those of Palestinian nationalism, progressive political thought, but also traditional Islamic views, brought about by the cultural context, and also by members of Fatah who were initially affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Gaza.[14] That blend was hardly chaotic, but intended to appeal to, and thus unify, various sectors of Palestinian society. Fatah's strategic emphasis was predicated on armed struggle as the only path to liberation. The movement's ideological views were centered on authentic Palestinian nationalism, as opposed to nationalist constructs formulated in Cairo and other Arab capitals. But the October meeting yielded more than an emphasis on the need for an independent "Palestinian entity"—real and figurative—but introduced the members of the new group to two important papers, "The Structure of Revolutionary Construction" and the movement's Manifesto, which were the product of incessant discussions that lasted for two years among Arafat and other founding members of Fatah, including Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad) and Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad).[15] Notably, the movement's political program called for a "democratic state on all [of] Palestine, in which Jews, Christians and Muslims could live in harmony as equal citizens."[16]

But the formation of the PLO in 1964, under Egyptian auspices, challenged Fatah's leadership and threatened to undermine the relatively new and underfunded movement. The PLO stood for everything that Fatah's founders rejected. It was scarcely independent, and it hardly articulated a sovereign Palestinian agenda, even if through Arab discourse. The founding of the PLO represented a watershed movement in Fatah's early struggle. It forced the movement's hand to act, to claim its ideology and position as an indispensable Palestinian movement. While Palestinian guerrilla attacks were often coordinated with

and regulated by Arab governments, Fatah suddenly changed the prevailing paradigm. On January 3, 1965, it launched its first attack on Israel, aimed at blowing up a water diversion canal between the Jordan River and the Negev Desert.[17]

Although the success or failure of Fatah's first militant initiative was never fully determined, the attack represented a shift in course, and challenged Arab governments who understood fully the political price of losing control over Palestinian groups, thus the Palestinian cause altogether. Fatah's action, and the repeated, but limited attacks that followed, though inviting harsh Israeli reprisals, seemed of little relevance to the overall balance of power in the region. Damascus showed early support for Fatah, although almost all the raids launched by the group and its affiliates were carried out through Jordan. Finally, in late 1966, Nasser took notice of Fatah's determined raids, which also resulted in increasing the movement's popularity among refugees. That year saw Nasser's open support of the raids, and also the renewal of the relationship between Damascus and Cairo.[18] Consequently, the PLO's al-Shuqairi warmed to Fatah, despite the organization's early disapproval of the movement's self-regulating policies.

The 1967 war brought an end to the dilemma of independent Palestinian action. It shifted the focus to the West Bank and Gaza, and allowed Fatah to fortify its position in the light of Arab defeat and subsequent division. That division was highlighted most starkly in the August 1967 Khartoum summit, where Arab leaders clashed over priorities and definitions. Should Israel's territorial gains redefine the status quo ante? Should Arabs focus on returning to a pre-1967 situation or that of pre-1948? The PLO insisted that the defeat in the war should not compromise the integrity of the struggle, and that Palestine, all of Palestine, was still the pressing issue. Nasser's messages seemed, for once, befuddled, although he continued to advocate conventional military confrontation with Israel. Syria, on the other hand, didn't attend the summit. Nonetheless, the Arabs agreed that there would be no negotiations, no recognition and no peace with Israel, whose existence continued to be a source of loss, defeat and hostility throughout the region. The response to the war was not promising internationally either. The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 242, on November 22, 1967, reflecting US President Johnson's administration's wish to capitalize on the new status quo ante, that is, Israeli withdrawal "from occupied territories" in exchange for normalization with Israel.[19] The new language of the immediate post-1967 period alarmed Palestinians, who realized that any future political settlement was likely to ignore the situation that existed prior to the war, and would only attempt to remedy current grievances. As a result, Fatah determined the need for a swift resumption of armed struggle, this time in the West Bank itself, but not in Gaza.

The movement's underground infrastructure was promptly established in various West Bank towns, to which the operational headquarters of the movement was also transferred. Arafat was chosen to lead the armed struggle from within. Various Arab governments, including Syria, Algeria, Libya and

Saudi Arabia, showed eagerness to back the daring movement, and Saudi Arabia pledged financial support. But why did Fatah largely discount Gaza at the time? Reasons behind the decision were never fully clear. The Gazan populace was not prepared for an uprising, it was assumed, which was Fatah's main objective in its West Bank task.[20] If that was in fact the case, then the logic was undoubtedly fallacious. Gazans, who experienced a disproportionate amount of misery as a result of the previous wars, were most politicized and keenly welcomed armed struggle. In fact, they had led uprisings in the past demanding just that. It's most likely that Fatah found it most difficult to effectively lead a popular uprising in Gaza because the Strip was saturated with well-rooted political movements, including nationalists, socialists and Islamists. Nonetheless, in the West Bank, Fatah's plans were hardly a success. The Israeli military moved decisively to crush the movements' network of activists and affiliates, implementing collective punishment to quell any popular support that Fatah might have generated through its activism in the West Bank.

In 1968, Fatah was forced to retreat to its original tactics of focused armed struggle outside the newly occupied territories. Fatah and Arafat's prestige, however, significantly rose after the movement, joined by the Jordanian military, resisted a massive Israeli incursion into the town of Karameh, Jordan, in March 1968. Arafat and Fatah proved to be more than a militant group, more than an irritant at best, in a region rife with conventional armies. Fatah was to become the leading Palestinian faction, and Arafat was the man to define the new era. As was expected, in February 1969, Arafat was voted chairman of the PLO, months after he led the drafting of the PNC's Charter. Following Fatah's entry to the PLO, other groups did the same, notably the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) of George Habash.[21]

GAZA'S NEW RULERS

As Israel embarked on securing its occupation of Arab lands, it claimed that it was forced to occupy Gaza. The Strip was "a bone stuck in our throats," one Israeli leader commented.[22] However, it was resolved that Gaza was fated, like the West Bank, to accommodate a massive settlement and exploitation project. Its land was fertile for agriculture, and its labor was cheap and plentiful. Plans for moving Israeli settlers into Gaza were quickly formulated, although large, permanent settlements were not established by the Labor Party until the early 1970s. The first such settlement was Kfar Darom, followed over the years by 20 others. Although the number of Jewish settlers in Gaza always remained comparatively small, their settlements occupied much of Gaza's limited space and resources, and were positioned strategically to separate Gaza from Egypt, to cut the Strip in half, and to maintain a link to Israel itself. The settlements also served as a home for Israeli army officers and as warehouses for military equipment, readily available in times of Palestinian revolts, of which there were many.[23]

To easily control the Strip, Israel divided Gaza into zones, and nightly raids would target one refugee camp after another. The male population of the targeted area would be ordered into schoolyards or any other open fields. Some would be forced to strip, others would be chained and paraded outside the camp, some would be beaten, others arrested, and the most defiant would be shot, so as to set an example for the rest. A new kind of terror in Gaza was commencing, but Mohammed was not there to witness its early stages. He was killed in the war, or so his family believed. One of Mohammed's surviving comrades notified his parents that he saw Mohammed's body being hauled away in an army truck that drove into Egypt laden with many other dead soldiers. Perhaps he mistook Mohammed for someone else, or did indeed see him in the truckload of bodies, some living and others dead, and assumed that he was among the dead. Mohammed's end was a tragedy with which neither his family nor his wife could come to terms. For Zarefah, the loss was more than she could bear.

THE LIVING MARTYR

The funeral was modest. The family, like most Gazans, couldn't afford much by way of extravagant funeral arrangements. But most importantly, funerals of those killed in the war or in the subsequent days and months after were discreet, for bereaved families didn't want to generate unwelcome attention from the Israeli military administration that sought to control every aspect of Gaza's life, including grieving over those killed by the Israeli army. Nonetheless, posters of Mohammed's photo in his military uniform adorned the decaying walls of the refugee camp. He was officially a "martyr." As for Zarefah, following the traditional three-day funeral ritual, she emptied the rented room in Nuseirat and relocated with her daughter back to her mother's home in Buraij refugee camp. Just a few months ago, there was so much promise, a chance at liberation, return to the homeland, the honor of being regarded as the "international bride" and a contented marriage. Suddenly, everything was forever altered. Zarefah, after all, was widowed and destined to raise Suma alone.

And then one day Mohammed returned. True, he had quite a reputation of being impulsive and unpredictable, but returning from the dead was outlandish, even by his own standards. But there he was, dressed in civilian clothes, disheveled and emaciated. He looked many years older, although his disappearance into Egypt had lasted only a few months. He had remained in Cairo for a while, joined by many soldiers from his PLA unit. Initially, Egyptian authorities negotiated their return to Gaza through international mediation, but efforts failed, and some unit members favored Egypt over a perilous return to occupied Gaza. Discontented and worried about his family, Mohammed, along with a few others, sought a path to the Strip by way of the West Bank. He first traveled to Jordan, slipped into the West Bank by way of a complicated mountain journey, then to Gaza, by smuggling his way through Israel. The final leg of his journey was the most precarious. He could've been

apprehended, tortured, or even killed at any stage in his trip, but in the West Bank, he was helped by many kind Palestinian villagers. After all, Mohammed was a freedom fighter. Zarefah could never convey her feelings at the moment she saw Mohammed standing on her doorstep. Some feelings are simply too sacred to express with mere words. In Zarefah's case, only tears, and plenty of them, could express the relief and reproach of a poor widow, left to fend for herself in a refugee camp, and then witnessing her husband's return from the dead, a living martyr.

In some ways, Mohammed was lucky. Israel immediately had tried to penetrate Gazan society by planting collaborators in their midst. The collaborators were locals, who for various reasons, including blackmail and coercion, agreed to work with the Israelis. Their mission was straightforward, to report on the activities of Gazans that might be considered hostile to Israel. Every Palestinian in Gaza, as was the case in the West Bank, was to have a profile at the Israeli military administration's offices. Thanks to the diligent work of the collaborators, organized resistance aimed at Israel, violent or otherwise, was often stopped in its very early stages. Collaborators were also planted to pose as resistance organizers themselves. The objective was not only to infiltrate the resistance, but also to create a state of total panic and mistrust among Palestinians. Nonetheless, Mohammed was indeed lucky, for upon his return to Gaza, the number of collaborators was still limited, and the news of his return was enough to mystify and delight friends and neighbors in the refugee camp, but not to cause him direct trouble with the Israeli army.

However, the day of reckoning was yet to arrive. A few months after Mohammed's return, the Israeli military ordered all those who had served in the Egyptian military or police to report to the local police stations, which were still vacant following the war, or used exclusively by the Israeli army. Those who refused were hunted down and punished; thus Mohammed, like hundreds of others, obliged. He reported to the Nuseirat refugee camp police station near the beach. In past years, he had served as a guard there. Once the former officers were assembled, they were greeted with a hearty speech delivered in an Iraqi Arabic dialect by a high-ranking Israeli military officer. The officer gave Mohammed and his former comrades a presentation that adhered to the following line: "Israel is here to preserve peace and security. We have nothing against Gaza, and we want your help in keeping peace in this area, by apprehending the troublemakers, and the terrorists who always force Israeli hands to act against Gaza in ways that bring harm to you and your families."

The former Gazan soldiers were asked to join a police force under the command of the Israeli army. Their job was to coordinate with the Israeli army in "security matters," and to guard the coastal areas from "terrorist infiltration." The Israeli officer finished his talk by offering a salary that was several times greater than that offered by the Egyptian government or the PLA. The Gazan men said nothing. Mohamed, too, stared at the ground, ashamed and reluctant. But then, the Israeli officer asked them to make a choice. "Those who want to work with Israel, stay where you are, and those

who don't, move over there," he gestured. Defeated and penniless, maybe, but Mohammed was too proud to compromise on his principles. Without hesitation, he walked away from the group and stood, alone on the opposite side. The rest didn't necessarily wish to join the Israeli police force, but were terrified that walking away from the group could also blacklist them as "troublemakers" and "terrorists" themselves. The Israeli officer asked Mohammed, derogatorily, why he had made such a seemingly foolish choice. What the Israeli officer didn't ask for, nor did he expect, was a speech, to be delivered by Mohammed, a proud student of Islamic philosophy and Marxist dialectics. He would have never forgiven himself for missing the opportunity to make amends with his loss and defeat, and register a semblance of defiance in what was meant to be his weakest moment ever. Mohammed turned his back to the Israeli officer and the Israeli army entourage, faced his former comrades, and avidly countered. He delivered his own speech, and it went something like this:

> My brothers and my comrades, we are all joined by a common sorrow and fate. We all fondly remember the rolling hills and valleys of our homeland, its villages, towns, its farms and its humble yet dignified way of life. We long for the days of quiet and peaceful coexistence that Palestine offered, and we grieve the loss of life, the assault on our dignity, the destruction of our schools, mosques, homes in hundreds of villages that are now a fleeting memory. Our struggle has been an honorable and worthy cause, and it is by far more precious than trivial salaries and extraneous police uniforms the invader offers. I would rather starve, along with my family, a free man, than to live rich in slavery with badges of dishonor.

By the time Mohammed concluded his speech, many of his friends had joined him in his refusal to work for the Israelis. Soon after, Mohammed had an exhaustive and detailed profile on the Israeli military intelligence desk in Gaza. Mohammed Baroud was officially an agitator.

ABU ANWAR

Mohammed returned home with his dignity intact, but with nothing with which to console Zarefah, whose financial worries were augmented by the new baby growing in her belly. If living in an Egypt-administered Gaza was hard enough, surviving in an Israeli-occupied Gaza was most difficult. It was ironic how Gazans, whose poverty seemed ever-lasting, longed for the "good old days" of pre-1967. Things could get worse in Gaza after all. Palestinians in the Strip were suffocated to the point that when Israel eased its military regulations and allowed Gazans to seek jobs as day laborers in Israel, thousands of Gazan men lined up at the border point, carrying a can of sardines and a loaf of bread in one hand, their shoes in the other, ready to chase after any Israeli "boss" willing to offer employment. But why the chasing? Some Israeli bosses wanted to ensure that they would choose the

strongest and best cheap day laborers. They would drive slowly by a crowd of Gazan workers dotting the border area and yell out what kind of work was on offer and how many workers they required, then they would take off, allowing the fastest and strongest to jump into the speeding vehicle first. This humiliating practice was commonplace throughout the years and symbolically defined the terms of employment of Gaza's cheap labor in Israel. It was also common to see an old man being carried by young men as they would all run towards the speeding vehicles, so as to give elders an equal chance at earning a few Israeli liras, which was still the Israeli currency at the time.

Although hardly acknowledged, Israel owes much of its economic prosperity in the years 1967–87 to the Palestinian cheap labor market.[24] Evidently, the main advantage of employing Palestinians was that workers from the Occupied Territories, who paid heavy taxes on their little income, cost Israeli employers a fraction of what they paid their own countrymen. Moreover, Palestinian workers, especially those in Gaza, were exploitable. They received little pay, no benefits, no health insurance, no pension, and could be fired at any time and for any reason, for there were always thousands waiting at the border, with their can of sardines and loaf of bread in one hand and their shoes in the other, ready to run and leap into the abyss of an Israeli truck.

> We pay income tax, excise tax, property tax, municipal tax, and other taxes, and we get nothing back. The Israelis spend no money on public works or health services and extremely little on education and other services. The Israelis use our tax money to support their hated military presence; they use [our own taxes] to finance their continued occupation [of our own land].[25]

But for Mohammed, one visit to the border was enough to turn him away from such belittling methods of employment. Even if he wished to join the crowd of anxious men seeking to secure enough income for one more day of survival, Mohammed would have not fared very well. His health was deteriorating rapidly, as his asthma was not simply an inconvenient irritation, but it made breathing his only priority at times. It was now a consistent burden that would deteriorate even more and would reach severe stages with increased stress. Employment in Israel, it seemed, was an intense manifestation of both physical degradation and anxiety.

Once again, Mohammed's options were restricted. He had shunned the only type of work in which he had experience, thanks to his lofty speech before the Israeli officer. Unable to accommodate the requirements of a manual day laborer in Israel, and not qualified to teach at a UN school in the Strip, Mohammed, once again, thought of employment abroad. Returning to Saudi Arabia was for a while a fleeting thought, but when Zarefah delivered Anwar, their second-born and first son, the notion became inevitable. At the least, his past Saudi adventures were the closest he ever had to success in the workplace. With no other viable alternative, Mohammed, once again, crossed Sinai, to Egypt and finally to Saudi Arabia. This time, he was joined by a faithful

relative, Rafiq. Zarefah, yet again, was back in her mother's home with Suma and Anwar, a sweet boy with dimples gracing both cheek and chin. Although his birth came at a most trying time for his parents, they were still overjoyed by his arrival. Now that Mohammed and Zarefah had a boy, they could both proudly relegate their first names in favor of their new titles. Mohammed was now Abu Anwar (father of Anwar) and Zarefah was Um Unwar, (mother of Anwar). Thus, when Mohammed carried his hand luggage and took off to Sinai, Zarefah waved to him, "Goodbye Abu Anwar. May Allah bring you back, safe and prosperous." Joined by his companion, Rafiq, he waved back, "Goodbye, Um Anwar", and left.

RESISTANCE

It's rather strange that, despite the rapid changes that were shaping the present and the future of the Middle Eastern region around Gaza, as well as Gaza itself, the lives of Mohammed, Zarefah and so many like them, remained unchanged: they were and remained, at all times, politically marginalized and economically devastated. Even stranger, they subsisted, fought back and, somehow, dared to hope. Mohammed's departure on another Saudi odyssey was his way of fighting back. He refused to be subdued, to collaborate with, or serve the enemy in any way, even if his life depended on it. But the fact is that Gaza, as a collective was also fighting back. As soon as Gazans absorbed the shock of the 1967 Naksa, they began devising various methods of resistance. And since resistance was a culture, Gaza needed time to comprehend the magnitude of its loss, and to formulate a collective retort to its latest challenge, the greatest yet endured. Immediately, acts of armed resistance began erupting in and around Gaza. In fact, Gaza became a hotbed for armed attacks against Israeli soldiers as soon as the Israeli military claimed complete control over the Strip. Armed groups already existed in Gaza, and weapons that were left in Gaza following the war were obtainable. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Fatah, Islamic resistance groups, members of disbanded PLA units, and new groups that had sprung up after the occupation led the violent campaign that targeted Israeli military installations in the Strip.[26] One of the new groups was the United National Front, which itself unified the Communist Party, the Ba'ath Party, and the Palestine Liberation Front.[27] Nationalists, Socialists, pan-Arabists and Islamists quickly mobilized in defense of the Strip, despite their modest chances of denting the massive military capabilities of the Israeli army. But again, resistance was a culture, and Gaza fought back simply because that's what the Gaza culture historically dictated: resistance in itself was a victory, and surrender was not an option.

The Israeli army was quick to notice the strong ties between Gazans and their resistance. Early Israeli attempts at turning the people against resistance factions failed. New groups were assembled faster than old ones were dismantled or destroyed. While Gazans were pushed to cheap employment in Israel, that iniquitous relationship was by no means enough to distract from the fight at hand. However, the armed resistance in Gaza faced many

difficult challenges. On one hand, the Israeli army was dominant and ready to use the most violent means of collective repression to achieve its goals; on the other, Gaza was cut off from the outside world and the existing resources of weapons and supplies were quickly depleting. The stiff resistance that Gaza put out following the war of 1967 began to peter out in 1971. The specific year was not accidental. Two momentous events took place around the same time and were largely responsible for weakening the armed resistance, albeit the birth of a new form of collective resistance.

THE JORDAN CONNECTION

What started in the late 1968 as sporadic clashes, culminated in late 1970 into a full-blown war between the Jordanian army and PLO factions, including Fatah, the PFLP and other left-wing factions. Leftist Palestinians resolved that the Jordanian monarchy was corrupt, and insincere in its confrontation with Israel. That position was half-heartedly shared by Fatah, who wished to avoid an all-out confrontation with King Hussein's army. But Fatah's bid for the leadership of the PLO was greatly challenged by left-wing groups, and Fatah was compelled to live up to the expectations placed on a faction that positioned itself as a leader of a liberation movement. Palestinian groups feared that the king was actively working to disarm the factions, and hence armed struggle against Israel, altogether. The king, on the other hand, was losing control of his country to the growing influence of the PLO, which was backed by Egypt, Syria, Libya and other Arab governments. In order for one party to preserve its own fight against Israel (a fight that is largely disowned by weakened and defeated Arabs) and for the other to preserve its control over its own country and political agenda, a collision looked inevitable. In June 1970, left-wing organizations clashed with the Jordanian army, followed by a Fatah-mediated ceasefire agreement, which failed to hold for long.[28] On September 16, Amman Radio announced the establishment of a military government, and an all-out "civil war" commenced.[29] By then, Palestinian guerrilla groups, who were accused of developing "a state within a state," had controlled several strategic positions within Jordan.

However, the Jordan war of 1970–71 was not only a story of a king losing his country to radical guerrillas, bent on establishing a state within a state. The causes of the war were more convoluted and far reaching. A reasonable commentary on the war, which saw the end of the armed PLO presence in Jordan, and the massacre of thousands of Palestinian refugees at the hands of the Jordanian army, is one that takes regional as well as international factors into account. The resounding Arab defeat of 1967 underscored an important realization among Palestinian groups, as well as radical Arab opposition groups at the time: Arab regimes were corrupt, self-seeking and had used the struggle for Palestine for their own personal gains and purposes, aimed at presenting themselves as regional leaders but never with the serious intent of engaging Israel in a long-term struggle. What was particularly revealing is that following the defeat of 1967, Arab governments appeared ready to settle their

personal and territorial grievances with Israel, without paying much heed to the Palestinian issue. In July–August 1970, King Hussein of Jordan, President Nasser of Egypt and the Israeli government agreed to a proposal to end the war of attrition, which had been waged since 1969 along the Suez Canal and the Israeli-Jordanian border. William Rogers, US Secretary of State during the Nixon Administration, formulated the plan, which also included other initiatives that were meant to lead to negotiations and normalization with Israel and ultimately declare Jordan as a Jordanian-Palestinian state.[30] The PLO, the PNC and most Palestinian factions strongly objected to the Rogers Plan. Some called for the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan, accusing it of complacency and of striving to liquidate the Palestinian cause and the armed resistance altogether.

Naturally, Palestinian factions were radicalized following the defeat of the Arabs and were emboldened by their ability to withstand greater military pressure than that withstood by conventional Arab armies. But the Rogers Plan created much alarm among Palestinian factions that a regional conspiracy was being molded to benefit Israel and Arab rulers, under American auspices, at the expense of the Palestinians. It was no surprise that that particular period witnessed a new tactic aimed exclusively at creating international attention that would compel regional and international powers to take Palestinians into account before finalizing any long-term deals that might exclude a just solution to the question of Palestine. Left-wing Palestinian groups resorted to airplane hijackings. On September 6, the PFLP simultaneously hijacked four airplanes, with demands ranging from freeing Palestinian prisoners, addressing Palestinian grievances and acknowledging refugee rights, and so on.[31] Some Palestinian factions wanted to impose the Palestinian problem on the international agenda, believing that such precarious acts were the only available option. King Hussein, an important party in the Rogers Plan, or any other Middle East settlement, wanted to bring the crisis in his country to an immediate halt, and thus moved in full force against the factions. Palestinians and their allies seemed to control the situation at times, but the Jordanian army, led mostly by loyalist Bedouin forces, regained the upper hand, especially as regional and international powers moved to the king's aid. Amongst these forces was the United States, which preemptively sent its Sixth Fleet to the eastern Mediterranean; Israel, meanwhile, undertook "precautionary military deployments" against the guerrilla forces, and blocked any aid coming their way from Syria.[32]

On September 25, a ceasefire agreement was signed. Most Palestinian factions were either disarmed or left the country, into Lebanon, and elsewhere. Nasser, who had failed to stop the slaughter in Jordan which followed the defeat of the PLO, or to retrieve his country's lost territories to Israel, died on September 28 with a tainted legacy and unfulfilled dream of Arab unity. He had been the only Arab leader that most Palestinians trusted. His sudden death was an unparalleled loss for Palestinians on many levels, sentimentally and materially as well. Many Palestinians felt "orphaned" by his absence, especially as it came at a time that was forever marked in Palestinian collective

memory as Black September, a deadly onslaught of which Israel was, for once, not the perpetrator.

The situation in Jordan was tied to Gaza in many ways. Resistance groups in the Strip received material and moral support from PLO factions that were defeated in Jordan and were forced to disarm and escape to Lebanon, where new challenges and confrontations were to follow. Disheartened and isolated, armed resistance in Gaza was fading out by the early 1970s. But it never died out completely.

THE SHARON CONNECTION

The demise of armed struggle in Jordan would have not been sufficient in itself to weaken the resistance in Gaza. The additional factor was Ariel Sharon, the head of Israel's Defense Forces' southern command, which was entrusted with the bloody task of "pacifying" the headstrong Strip after the 1967 war. Sharon was dubbed the "Bulldozer," for he understood that pacifying Gaza would require heavy armored vehicles, but Gaza's crowded neighborhoods, and its alleyways weaving through the destitute refugee camps, were not suited for heavy machinery. Thus he resolved to bulldoze thousands of homes, to prepare the way for tanks, and more bulldozers to move in and topple even more homes. Modest estimates put the number of homes destroyed in August 1970 alone at 2,000.[33] Over 16,000 Palestinians were made homeless; thousands were forced to relocate from one refugee camp into another. The Beach refugee camp at Shati near Gaza City sustained most of the damage. Many fled for their lives, taking refuge in mosques and UN schools and tents. Sharon's declared objective was targeting the terrorist infrastructure. What he in fact meant was targeting the very population that resisted and aided the resistance, for they indeed were the very infrastructure he harshly pounded for many days and weeks. Sharon's bloody sweep also resulted in the execution of 104 resistance fighters and the deportation of hundreds of others, some to Jordan, others to Lebanon, with the rest simply left to rot in the Sinai Desert.[34]

Israel's message to Gaza was loud and clear: Arabs have graciously accepted their defeat and Palestinians must comply and resign to the same. Resistance was futile, and the Beach refugee camp, almost completely destroyed in a few weeks, was a stark example that Gazans were expected to consider then and always. Needless to say, the extreme violence to which Gaza was subjected in the years following the 1967 war, particularly the reckoning months of 1971, was not merely intended to terrorize the population into submission, but was a stern effort to restructure Palestinian society in Gaza under new ideas, slogans and culture, a society that would be satisfied with the income generated through cheap labor and willing to accept servitude under an Israeli flag. The plan, evidently, didn't work, but it did in fact subject Gaza to a sense of collective shock, followed by profound introspection; eventually it yielded an even more emboldened culture of resistance. The "shock therapy" to which Palestinians in Gaza were subjected, and the aftermath of that reality were not outcomes of one factor, but many factors, some specific to Gaza

itself, others regional and some international. Indeed, when Gazans marched to mourn Nasser's death, they chanted his name, decried the treason of the Arabs, cursed Sharon, condemned the Rogers Plan, reaffirmed their right of return, hailed the PLO and swore to fight for their freedom, till "victory or martyrdom."

THE FALAFEL TERRORISTS

Mohammed was present, for the most part, during the early 1970s, the years that shaped Gaza's new collective identity and aspirations. But before he eventually returned to the Strip for good, after a failed journey to Saudi Arabia, he made several stops in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. He tried many professions, including construction worker in various towns in Lebanon, a gardener in Damascus and a day laborer in Cairo. Mohammed understood that by returning to Gaza empty-handed, he would have no viable options for making a living and raising a family; joining Gaza's cheap labor force would eventually become the least undignified alternative. He wandered through various countries, hoping to stumble upon an unexpected opportunity, a last chance at self-respect. Alas, cheap laborers were as unfortunate in Arab countries as they were in Gaza. Therefore, Mohammed and his companion Rafiq resolved that returning to Gaza was a necessity. Mohammed, however was born with the undying spirit of an entrepreneur, much like his own father back in Beit Daras, many years ago. But Mohammed never possessed enough capital required to launch and sustain his own business. His only experience was that in Mecca, years ago, when his knick-knack stand received modest success. He wanted to repeat that experience, but this time, he wished to try something new, so instead of selling knick-knacks, he was going to sell falafel. Why falafel? It's not entirely clear, but the late 1960s witnessed a new growth in the petroleum and related industries in the kingdom; waves of Arabs and other workers were arriving to staff the country's oil companies, hospitals, schools, in both public and private sectors. Mohammed figured that the food industry must be booming in the Kingdom as well, and he couldn't think of a more cost-effective, neutral and easily prepared food that would please everyone than falafel. Once again, joined by his faithful relative and companion, Rafiq, he headed back to Saudi Arabia. In a small immigrant community near Jeddah, he set up a falafel stall.

"Grand Opening," proclaimed the grand sign propped up against the petite and negligible falafel stall as Mohammed and Rafiq eagerly took their positions. Mohammed fired up the grill, and sidekick Rafiq finalized the falafel mix. Things seemed to be moving in the right direction; Mohammed's expectations were falling into place, as the simple sign, promising a cheap price for an "exquisite meal" generated much interest, including, regrettably, that of the local police, alarmed at the presence of many immigrants standing in one long line, for falafel was an unknown delicacy in parts of Saudi Arabia. Mohammed calculated that once the first batch of falafel was ready, he would send Rafiq with a few warm sandwiches to pacify the snooping police and

keep them at bay. Together, Mohammed dreamed that these two would make their fortune and return to their families with wealth unimaginable. He let his daydreams get away from him as he called to the crowd that they were in for one of the greatest culinary experience of their lives. Rafiq, known for his laxity and negligence, claimed to have followed the falafel recipe to the letter. But with one critical component Rafiq had improvised, adding excessive quantities of Sodium Bicarbonate, insisting that it would give their falafel a unique and "electrifying" taste, at least that's what Mohammed later claimed, and Rafiq fervently denied. Regardless, when the first patties were dropped into the hot oil, amid the growing anticipation of the ever-swelling crowd, disaster struck. Overwhelming amounts of the "electrifying secret ingredient" caused the falafel to take off and erupt like mini, bite-sized grenades. Hot oil splattered everywhere, morsels exploded in mid-air and a confused crowd ran in fright, as did the police. "God damn you, Rafiq! God damn you a million times! You ruined me! What have you done? What did you put in the falafel?" Mohammed bellowed as they both ran for cover. Rafiq's "electrifying" ingredient was enough to place a warrant on Mohammed and his companion, for "disturbing the peace." The falafel terrorists fled the country, never to return, leaving behind the falafel stall and what could've been a successful business venture. Mohammed returned to Gaza, with no money and with no intention of ever leaving again.

WITHOUT ANWAR

Upon his return, Mohammed ventured into other types of work, opportunities that he mostly invented on his own. He realized that following the winter floods of the Gaza Valley, large deposits of gravel could be retrieved by digging a few feet into the soft layer of fresh dirt that covered the flooded areas in and around the valley. He assembled a few laborers, with the promise of a profitable return, rented a truck and headed to the valley. It took five of them a whole week to fill a large truck with gravel. Once the truck was filled with its capacity, Mohammed and his friends would drive the truck to a quarry, bargain over prices, unload the shipment of gravel to be used in concrete, check their money and return to fill the truck once again. The money was not much, but it was enough to keep the laborers going back for more. The work was exhausting, and Mohammed's asthma always stood in the way. But for him, it was either the draining work at the valley, or chasing behind an Israeli boss's car for work, an option that was still out of the question for Mohammed. The valley work was seasonal, for winter brought floods, and made digging impossible. Therefore, in the off-season, Mohammed would concoct some other eccentric ways to support his family.

Mohammed and Zarefah's children were happily unmindful of their parents' daily struggle. Suma loved her brother, who was also the darling of the neighborhood. His dimples reminded the neighbors of a famous Egyptian movie star, making the boy the talk of the camp. Anwar had no toys; however, his favorite playtime activity was placing his feet in his father's old army

boots, and dragging them around the room, and sometimes into the street. Zarefah and Suma would cheer and clap as Anwar would move about, however wobbly. At a year-and-a-half, Anwar looked and behaved in ways that promised a smart, handsome-looking boy. Zarefah and Mohammed couldn't wait for Anwar to grow up. But in Gaza, there were no guarantees, even with simple expectations. Anwar woke up one morning with a high fever. Zarefah rushed him to the UNRWA clinic that had nothing to offer but the same remedy for every ailment: aspirin. Mohammed was digging for gravel at the Gaza Valley as Zarefah stood alone begging the nurse to give her more than aspirin. She and her son were undeserving of a doctor visit, and transfer to a Gaza hospital was too consequential a call to make for a poor refugee woman and her dying child. Zarefah sat on the floor of the clinic for hours, until her son died in her arms. She swaddled him in her scarf and walked home. Mohammed had just finished selling the latest shipment of gravel and was happily returning home with some money, when he ran into Zarefah carrying lifeless Anwar. When he had left that morning at dawn, Anwar was sound asleep by his mother side. He greeted Zarefah and asked her to hand him the baby. He took such a pride in carrying the handsome boy in public. That's when he realized the dreadful look on Zarefah's face. "Anwar is dead," she said. Mohammed paused for a moment and screamed his son's name in agony. And when he could no longer breathe, he fainted.

Anwar was buried on a little plot in the refugee camp's main graveyard. His grave was a tiny mound of dirt, and a cactus marked the headstone. Mohammed understood that poverty had killed his son, and would spend the rest of his life fearing the revisitation of that injustice. For many days and weeks, Mohammed would spend his time at Anwar's grave. Many nights he was awakened by Zarefah, having fallen asleep on the little pile of sand beside the cactus. He spent his days there, placing coins and candy into the dirt, talking to his son, urging him not to be afraid and telling him of all the grand things that were awaiting him in heaven.

A year later, Mohammed and Zarefah had another son. They also named him Anwar, meaning "a brighter light."

8
An Olive Branch and a Thousand Cans of Tomato Sauce

I was born on July 22, 1972. The midwife who helped bring me into the world was an old refugee woman, the same midwife that helped deliver my siblings, who, at the time, included Suma, Anwar, the new Anwar and Thaer, meaning "revolutionary." I was born into a world which was, although tumultuous by any standards, kinder than the world to which my sister and brothers arrived. Suma, for example, appeared a few years before the Naksa; Anwar, immediately after; Thaer turned up amidst suffocating poverty; then, I, George, made my appearance. Yes, I was in fact first named George, before my father was compelled, more or less, to change it to my current name, Ramzy. To appreciate the denotation of my initial Christian name, one must divert, just a little.

Soon after Thaer was born, my father was completely broke. True, he was always broke, but even within poverty, there are degrees of poor, poorer and abjectly poor. The year was 1970, and my family largely subsisted on a broth made of crushed garlic and seasoned with salt, bread and tea. Suma and Anwar, each had one or two outfits, courtesy of the UNRWA. My father Mohammed's and my mother Zarefah's wardrobe didn't fare much better. Although creative in his desperate attempts to survive, Mohammed was soon to exhaust all his resources. But he truly hit rock bottom when he spent months offering his services to gamblers at a coffee shop in the Nuseirat refugee camp. As gamblers placed their small bets, Mohammed would keep track of their wins and losses, in exchange for a small fee, enough to pay for the rented room and acquire some basic needs; flour, sugar, tea and, of course, garlic.

Thaer's arrival called for a dramatic change, for Mohammed's family was growing beyond his meager means. He had already considered the idea of expanding his ingenuity to reach the West Bank, which fell under the control of the Israeli army following the 1967 war. The West Bank and Gaza were now geographically, if not geopolitically united. Both entities, along with East Jerusalem, were now officially the "Occupied Territories." The West Bank, much larger than Gaza in size, and with more viable economic potential, appeared to Mohammed as a more suitable compromise than working in Israel, or resuming his hopeless travels around the Middle East. Mohammed, lacking any other marketable skills, considered once again being a salesman. He determined that he needed an item that could be sold in the West Bank at a much higher price than that offered in Gaza, something with which he could justify trying his luck in an area considered by most Gazans, at the time, uncharted territory: carpets. Gaza's craftsmen produced, among other items,

bright and colorful handwoven carpets. Such a luxury item was expensive by Gazan refugees' standards, but perhaps less so in the West Bank's urban centers, that is, Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron and Jerusalem. Since Mohammed had no money of his own, he forged an agreement with a Gaza carpet-weaver that stipulated that Mohammed would sell the carpets in the West Bank, and split the profits with the producer back in Gaza.

Mohammed wasted no time, and a few days later, he was roaming the streets of Ramallah, hauling a large assortment of carpets on his back. He reinforced the immensely heavy load of his new merchandize with ropes that formed two handles on the ends. He held tightly on the handles as he braved the steep hills of the central West Bank town. "Oh, women of Ramallah; come and look at Gaza's unequaled carpets. Quality and prices that have no match anywhere," he would invariably yell. The only thing that consoled his chest pain, bruised feet and blistered hands was the fact that his carpets were selling faster than he ever expected. He would return to Gaza, and would start his West Bank expedition on the following day. He generated enough profit to pay for his own carpets in advance, and keep all his earnings. He eventually ventured to other West Bank towns, Nablus and Hebron, but nothing was to match his good fortune in Ramallah.

Mohammed's carpet-selling business was successful to the point that a few months later, he was able to move his family to a rented room in Ramallah. Unlike their room in the Gaza refugee camp, the room in Ramallah was spacious, with its own kitchen, and a view of the mountains. His family was in awe. Zarefah had never enjoyed so much open space in her entire life. Her memories consisted of crowded refugee camps, closed spaces and narrow alleyways; hence, when the wide open spaces and rolling hills greeted her every morning, she felt free, the kind of freedom that cannot be measured or confined by any tangible sense—not even military occupation and the like could spoil her joy. "I never appreciated our imprisonment in Gaza, until I lived in Ramallah," she told Mohammed, who, for once, could proudly claim that he provided a better life for his family.

But the move to the West Bank did more than that. It widened Mohammed's horizon, his sense of identity. He learned that the West Bank was as Palestinian as Gaza, and that the fate of the two entities could not be separated from the fate of all Palestinians and all of Palestine. Moreover, Mohammed could finally afford to take a day off each week. Zarefah would walk about Ramallah with her children, and Mohammed would visit the town's coffee shops, conversing with new friends, flexing his intellectual muscles, sharing ideas, books and jokes that he would eagerly glean from the *Reader's Digest*. But once Mohammed and his friends concluded their initial exchanges of new books and jokes, political commentary would soon commence: the unavoidable topic—the Israeli occupation.

During one of his grueling climbs near the center of Ramallah, he was called over by a kindly priest, who offered Mohammed some water while admiringly sorting through the carpets. Mohammed made a very good sale that day, as the priest bought all of Mohammed's carpets and requested more;

he paid the price Mohammed had asked, with no hassle and no bargaining. But that sale proved even more consequential, for the priest, Audeh Rantisi—himself a refugee from Lyda—was a prominent figure in Ramallah, not least because of his founding of a Christian orphanage, the Evangelical Home for Boys. Mohammed found in Rantisi a lifelong friend. Mohammed would visit Rantisi's orphanage many times, introducing his wife and kids to the ever-friendly priest. In Rantisi's home, Mohammed was to meet some of the West Bank's most luminary nationalists including Bassam Shakaa and Karim Khalaf, both of whom were to play a major role in political resistance in later years. Through their company, Mohammed learned of the details of the Israeli policies that followed its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. He was introduced to new names, new plans and new conspiracies. Mohammed's visits to Rantisi's home were frequent and enlightening. The heated discussions would often converge on one specific name connected to a clear, frightening agenda: Yigal Allon.

ISRAELI "FINGERS"

Following a disastrous war, determined Arab disunity, and the Jordan civil war and subsequent massacres, a new realism permeated Palestinian society, both at home and abroad. Palestinians by then realized that some Arab regimes have always been a part of the problem, and hardly ever the solution; that Palestinian unity, formulated around a true Palestinian national identity, was their best possible option under the worst possible circumstances; that US foreign policy was part and parcel in their suffering and subjugation, and that Israel's territorial ambitions knew no bounds. Such depressing but revealing realizations produced several layers of societal retorts, emphasized in two major sectors of the West Bank and Gaza-based societies: The majority wanted to withstand, organize, and fight back, while a small, self-seeking, "pragmatic" minority—which in the past had tied its interest to that of Egypt or the Jordanian monarchy—was willing to shift alliances once more to accommodate the Israeli occupation, bringing to the fore a brand new phenomenon: the Palestinian "moderates." But Mohammed's new friends were hardly "moderate" according to the Israeli definition, for they sought to mobilize society against the colonization schemes that lurked everywhere.

Israel, for its part, sought to fortify its occupation, first by rejecting peace overtures made by Egypt's new president Anwar Sadat, starting as early as 1971,[1] and secondly, by unleashing settlement construction throughout the West Bank and Gaza. The early settlements had strategic military purposes, for the intent was to create enough "facts on the ground" to alter the nature of any future peace settlement; the result was thus the "Allon Plan," named after Yigal Allon, a former general and minister in the Israeli government who took on the task of drawing an Israeli vision for the newly conquered Palestinian territories. The plan sought to annex, for security purposes, more than 30 percent of the West Bank and all of Gaza.[2] It stipulated the establishment of a "security corridor" along the Jordan River, as well as outside the "Green

Line," a one-sided Israeli demarcation of its borders with the West Bank.[3] The plan envisioned the incorporation of all of the Gaza Strip into Israel, and was meant to return parts of the West Bank to Jordan as a first step toward implementing the "Jordanian option" for Palestinian refugees, that is, ethnic cleansing coupled with the creation of an "alternative homeland" for Palestinians. Evidently, the plan failed, but not in its entirety. Palestinian nationalists ensured that no alternative homeland was ever to be realized, but the seizure, ethnic cleansing and annexation of occupied land was a resounding success. What was also important and consequential, is that the Allon Plan provided an unmistakable signal that the Labor government of Israel had every intention of retaining at least large parts of the West Bank and all of Gaza, and had no intention of honoring United Nations Security Council Resolution 242.

To capitalize on the government's alluring settlement policies in the West Bank, a group of religious Jews rented a hotel in the Palestinian town of Hebron to spend Passover at the Cave of the Patriarchs, and simply refused to leave, igniting the biblical passion of religious orthodox Israelis across the country, who referred to the West Bank by its biblical name, "Judea and Samaria." Their move also ignited the ire of Palestinians, who watched in complete dismay as their land was conquered, renamed and later settled by outsiders. In 1970, to "diffuse" the situation, the Israeli government constructed the Kiryat Arba settlement at the outskirts of the Arab city, which invited even more orthodox Jews to Hebron.[4] The Allon Plan may have been intended for strategic purposes, but soon after, what was strategic and political intermingled with what became religious and spiritual. Regardless, in the final analysis, Palestinians were losing their land at a rapid speed, a process that would eventually lead to major Israeli population transfers, initially to occupied East Jerusalem—which was itself illegally annexed shortly after the 1967 war—and eventually to the rest of the Occupied Territories. Over the years, the strategic settlement growth was complemented by religiously motivated expansion, championed by a vibrant movement, exemplified in the founding of Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) in 1974. The movement was on a mission to settle the West Bank with legions of fundamentalists.[5]

The Allon Plan also extended to include Gaza and Sinai. Allon wished to establish a "finger" of territories to serve as a buffer between Egypt and Gaza. "Buffer" was in this context a codename for settlements and military outposts at the southern end of the Gaza Strip and adjacent areas of northern Sinai, a region that Israel dubbed the "Rafiah Plain."[6] In early 1972, thousands of men, women and children were driven from their homes in southern Gaza. They were mostly Bedouin farmers, who had settled the area for generations, but their presence was an obstacle to an Israeli army blueprint that would soon incorporate half of Gaza. They were evacuated without being permitted to even carry their possessions, however modest. The Israeli army claimed that "only" 4,950 people were ethnically cleansed from the area. But the tribes' sheikhs contended that more than 20,000 were forced from their homes and land.[7]

But it is Ariel Sharon, not Allon, who is credited for originating the "fingers" concept:

> [Sharon] recounts standing on a dune (near Gaza) with cabinet ministers, explaining that along with military measures, to control the Strip, he wanted "fingers" of settlement separating its cities, chopping the region in four. Another "finger" would thrust through the edge of Sinai, helping create a "Jewish buffer zone between Gaza and Sinai to cut off the flow of weapons" and divide the two regions in case the rest of Sinai was ever returned to Egypt.[8]

One of Sharon's "fingers" was to come too close to Mohammed and Zarefah's refugee camp in Gaza. When Mohammed eventually left the West Bank and returned to Gaza, to enroll Suma in an UNRWA school, he was to find that Gaza's landscape had changed in many ways, thanks to the steady buildup of Israeli military outposts and settlements, one of which was Netzarim. The latter was established between Gaza City and the refugee camps of Buraij and Nuseirat "to close off the spread of the city southward, cutting Gaza off from the southern [half of the] Strip," and to help the army keep watch on the area.[9]

Gaza's future looked unpromising, but Mohammed was in better financial and social standing than ever before.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

When Mohammed returned to Gaza, he had accumulated a reasonable amount of money, enough to upgrade his utterly lacking lifestyle to one that was a bit less meager. Fearing that the money would eventually be exhausted, he made a daring decision to purchase the room which he had rented for years. He demolished one of the walls, and expanded the room a few feet into an adjacent open area. He added a kitchen, turning the room into a "house." The new house faced the graveyard where Anwar was buried. The view of his son's grave was good for Mohammed, for it allowed him to "keep an eye on the boy"; but it was also a major responsibility to ensure that Anwar's resting place was always clean and cared for, and that troublesome children were kept away from the tiny mound of dirt.

Then, I arrived, and was named George. Mohammed was very fond of George Habash, the founder of the socialist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). That, in part, explains why I was given such an unusual name for a Gazan Muslim, for the name "George" was a distinctly Christian name. But there is more. During his stay in Ramallah, Mohammed became familiar with Israeli attempts to divide Palestinians into camps, pro-PLO extremists vs. pro-Israeli occupation moderates, Christians vs. Muslims, and so on. He wanted to advocate, even if symbolically, that Palestinians were united by their nationalism, common heritage and struggle, as opposed to

divided by their religious narratives. I was named George to underscore my father's wish to transcend religious divides.

TOMATO SAUCE AND LEMON JUICE

Mohammed's family grew in size, but also in demands and expectations. Suma was in the first grade, and that too meant additional expenses. Finally, Mohammed decided to brave looking for work in Israel. He insisted that his decision to go to Israel was not a compromise on his principles. He was not a cheap day laborer, but a "businessman." Mohammed toiled to find any dignified interpretation of his new work. But what he in fact did was travel to Israel, venturing from one town to another, looking for scrap metal, factory rejects, and such, to sell back in Gaza. His early trips were confined to areas close to the Strip, such as Ashkelon and Kiryat Gat, but he eventually expanded his trips to reach Tel Aviv, Reshon LeTsiyon, and so on. It pained him to see Palestinian ruins of the pre-1948 Nakba; he tried to relate the Hebrew names of some of the Israeli towns and villages to their Arabic origins. His taxi passed repeatedly by the town of Ashdod, once Isdud, where his brother Ahmad went to school. The ruins of the school, riddled with bullets, still occupied a visible hill that greeted him every time. But Mohammed needed to focus on the task at hand.

In one Israeli town, he located a textile factory that dumped leftover fabric in one large container, to be discarded at a later date. Mohammed asked to sort through the fabric and buy what he found useful. After hours of searching, he would stuff the valuable pieces into large bags, pay the amount requested and haul the bags to a nearby highway to wait for a taxi that would take him, and his precious finds, back to Gaza. The next day, Mohammed would carry his bags to one of Gaza's markets and sell the fabric as material that could be used for making blankets, stuffing pillows or mattresses. Whatever didn't sell, Zarefah would diligently stitch into blankets herself, as Mohammed returned to Israel, seeking more.

One day, Mohammed struck gold, or rather, a shipment of tomato sauce and lemon juice. An Israeli food company was about to discard two enormous containers of food products when Mohammed stepped in. The items were edible, but the cans had been exposed to moisture and became corroded with rust, hence unmarketable according to Israeli standards. Mohammed offered a small price for both containers; his proposal was immediately accepted. He was then faced with the challenge of coming up with the money to purchase and then transport the containers back to Nuseirat. He rushed to Gaza to prepare for what would become the deal of a lifetime. To offset some of the costs, Zarefah readily offered a golden necklace which Mohammed had bought for her in Ramallah. They gathered what was left from their savings in the West Bank, and Mohammed rushed back to Israel, but not before making two important stops, one at a Gaza goldsmith, and another to hire a large truck. Just before the Nuseirat market was ready to close, Mohammed stood atop the back of a truck, and with a hand-held megaphone he called out: "Oh people

of Nuseirat; gather around for the deal of a lifetime; imported lemon juice and tomato sauce at unbeatable prices. Ten cans for one lira … .” The dead market was quickly revived, not because of Mohammed’s deafening shouts, but because such a price was unbeatable. Within an hour, Mohammed had sold all of the rusty cans to shopkeepers and individual customers, reserving the nicest few for his devoted wife, who sat at home, not knowing the nature or outcome of Mohammed’s latest undertaking.

Mohammed returned home, but not before making one last stop, to a kindly goldsmith who sold Zarefah’s necklace back to him for the same price he purchased it at earlier the same day. When he arrived at his house, he spoke not a word to Zarefah, and typical of his playful manner, he pulled out a cigarette and sat down, puffing and shaking his head as if his venture was an utter failure. It was his classic trick before delivering any good news. But Zarefah was too naïve to decode Mohammed’s many ploys. She sat down by him and consoled him. “May all the money in the world be damned as long as you have your health,” she said. “So what, you lost the money and the necklace? Who cares; just remember, we will always have each other.” Mohammed, still playing his absurd game, took the necklace from his pocket. “Oh, are you talking about this necklace?” he inquired with a quirky smile. Zarefah was befuddled. What could possibly be the meaning of this? He continued, “… . and are you referring to this money?” He asked inquisitively as he pulled a large roll of bills out of his pocket, much more than she had ever seen. Zarefah was dumbfounded. She hugged her husband and cried. Mohammed hugged her back triumphantly. His little charade achieved the maximum intended results, and his successful business call generated him enough money to return to Israel for more such adventures.

Mohammed was somewhat content with the compromise regarding his commitment to his family and the unavoidable relationship with Israel. Gaza was subjected to utter dependency on its occupiers. Money generated in Israel represented the greater portion of Gaza’s income. Mohammed was also forced to seek work in Israel, but as a “businessman,” not a laborer; again, this was the best possible compromise under the worst possible circumstances, logic to which Mohammed resorted time and time again.

Once more, Mohammed expanded his house, by purchasing another room, left empty by another tenant. He also purchased a modern-looking radio, unlike the scruffy old radio he previously owned. The radio had its own stand, and every night the family would happily sit around it, sipping mint tea and listening to the news which was dominated by similar, redundant topics: Anwar Sadat, war, settlements, Henry Kissinger, peace talks and all the rest.

WHEN GAZA LIKED SADAT

Mohammed could recall the days when he, like most Gazans, once liked Anwar Sadat. True, Sadat was never to take the place of Nasser; but nevertheless, he seemed adamant in his intentions to retrieve Arab lands occupied in 1967.

In fact, he made that a key commitment as soon he took office in late 1970. But Egypt's political language was shifting, even before Nasser's death. The uncompromising rhetoric that sought to retrieve all Arab lands, including historic Palestine, was yielding to a more "pragmatic" language that, for example, found a partial Israeli withdrawal from Sinai—as indicated in the plan of US Secretary of State William Rogers—a reasonable starting-point. Israel understood Nasser's political retreat as another victory, another belated blow following its earlier decisive military triumph. The Arabs, who were easily defeated, would never dare risk a confrontation with Israel's "invincible army," or so thought Israeli leaders. A war of attrition which took place on both sides of the Suez Canal (1968–70) was further proof that a military stalemate was all that Egypt could possibly hope for. Therefore, Israel interpreted as weakness Sadat's offer of a peace settlement along the lines of UN Resolution 242, and, backed by the United States, rebuffed the overture.[10] Israel argued that it has the right to secure its borders whichever way it found fit and refused to return to pre-1967 borders, rejecting direct negotiations with Egypt.[11]

Israeli leaders felt that they were under no pressure to concede, neither territorially, nor politically. Israel's new prime minister, Golda Meir took office in March 1969 only to reiterate the same hubris of her predecessor, Levi Eshkol. She quickly rebuffed a French plan to mediate between Israel and the Arabs, and again, a Jordanian peace proposal, and later Sadat's.[12] Golda Meir was not simply conceited, however; she understood that in politics, concessions and overtures have their own logic, and she had no reason to concede an inch of occupied Arab land, nor to respond positively to any peace gestures. The Israeli army was in control of the situation on all fronts; Israeli bulldozers were carving out permanent settlements and military posts throughout the Occupied Territories, and the US was gladly ensuring Israel's military and political superiority. Washington's pro-Israeli stance was, by then, common knowledge, but it had morphed into unconditional backing under the hard-line policies of Henry Kissinger, who played an essential role in gearing US policies completely in favor of Israel when he served as National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State in the Nixon Administration. Thanks to Kissinger's endless advocacy for a strong Israel, US military aid to the latter increased dramatically in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Meanwhile, he maintained intense pressure on Egypt to disown its Soviet allies. Egypt, on the other hand, was frustrated that Soviet military aid (provided in accordance with the May 1971 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation)[13] was purportedly mediocre compared to that sent to Israel by the US. When Sadat ordered the departure from Egypt of more than 15,000 Soviet advisors and military experts, who had spent years rehabilitating the country's shattered military and developmental projects, he had perhaps hoped that the US would reciprocate by offering a more even-handed approach to the conflict in the Middle East. All he gained however was a vague US promise to bring the region's violence to an end, in accordance with UN Resolution 242.[14]

Betrayed by his own miscalculations, but also convinced that war was the only path to liberation, Sadat turned his efforts to consolidate the shaky Arab front, and began forging alliances whenever and wherever he could. He reached out to Syria's Hafez al-Assad, ultimately, in January 1973, forming a unified military command between Cairo and Damascus.[15] He also approached King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, and coordinated with Algeria's Boumedienne and Libya's Ghadaffi. He wished to involve Yasser Arafat, who was also receiving Syrian military aid in South Lebanon.[16] A semblance of Arab unity was being slowly created, backed by less consequential, though nonetheless important support initiatives from various regional and international bodies such as the Organization of African Unity, the United Nations General Assembly, the Organization of Non-Allied States, and so forth. Confident that the Arabs' moves were mere hype, Israel heightened the tension in the area when it shot down a Libyan airliner over Sinai, killing 74 people, in February 1973.[17] In a last-ditch effort at compelling Israeli withdrawal, Sadat turned to the UN Security Council, in the summer of 1973. The council voted on a resolution that demanded Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab land. The US vetoed the resolution on the grounds that it was "unbalanced."[18] Kissinger, the man who guided US foreign policy during that era, wrote in his memoirs of his aim:

> … to produce a stalemate until Moscow urged compromise, or until, even better, some moderate Arab regimes decided that the route to progress was through Washington … Until some Arab state showed a willingness to separate from the Soviets, or the Soviets were prepared to dissociate from the maximum Arab program, we had no reason to modify our policy.[19]

Hence, for Sadat, war seemed the only way forward.

THE IMMINENT, UNEXPECTED WAR

Somehow, Israel didn't see the war coming. Israeli leaders, military planners and political strategists couldn't imagine the Arabs capable of launching a war, never mind attain victory. For one, Israel calculated that Egypt required years to rebuild its shattered air force. What Israel didn't expect is that Egypt was ready to fight its aerial war using a new generation of Soviet surface-to-air missiles. Egypt also built giant sand barriers to hide the military activities abuzz at the western side of the Suez Canal. Egypt newspaper editorials were bemoaning their country's army's second-rate capabilities, to the satisfaction of Israel's military planners, when, on October 6, 1973, Egyptian and Syrian forces attacked Israeli forces on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. Along the length of the Golan line, hundreds of Syrian tanks poured forward. At the Suez Canal, a large Egyptian force crossed the waterway, on boats and floating bridges, easily penetrating, to the complete surprise of Israel's military experts, the Bar-Lev Line. Israel's supposedly formidable line of defense, named after General Chaim Bar-Lev, was an entrenched defense perimeter, which cost millions and was believed impervious to any Arab

counter-attack.[20] Not any more. The once unchallenged Israeli war force was to receive a decisive blow. Numerous Israeli airplanes were downed by Egyptian missiles. It seemed that history was playing its bizarre games all over again, and that Israel was paying the same price it exacted from the Arabs in 1967. Not only did the Arabs triumph in the early days of the 1973 war, but they also managed to outwit the combined Israeli and US intelligence. Israel later blamed US military intelligence for failing to expect the war. Thereafter, a US official informed Kissinger that "we were brainwashed by the Israelis, who brainwashed themselves."[21]

Brainwashed or not, the early days of the war were to prove that Israel's military and intelligence was, at best fallible, and at worse that of a second-rate Middle Eastern army. Just as the Arabs were gaining sudden confidence, and as Arab streets paused in awe, surprised by the advances of its conventional armies, the United States, once again, tipped the balance in favor of Israel. The US ordered a massive airlift of arms and ammunition to be sent to its beleaguered ally. Kissinger was entrusted to work out the necessary logistics and override whatever obstacles might arise in the Pentagon. Kissinger delivered, overseeing an operation larger than the Berlin airlift of 1948–49.[22] The US, oblivious to the Cold War tension resulting from its actions, was adamant to reverse Israel's losses. Indeed, by October 18, Israeli forces were driving back Arab armies. Better-equipped Israeli troops managed to oust Syrian forces from the Golan. Kissinger tried to win time before a ceasefire was reached, to allow Israel enough time to reverse its misfortunes. He flew to Moscow, and jointly with Russian officials drafted a ceasefire agreement, which was accepted by both sides on October 20, one day after Nixon managed to squeeze Congress for another $2 billion in emergency aid to Israel. Meanwhile, the Israeli army continued its advances, encircling Egypt's Third Army of 20,000 men on the east bank of the Suez Canal.

Although Israel managed to redeem some of its military blunders, it failed to regain its pre-1973 positions, either militarily, or politically. The air of arrogance that engulfed Israel following the war of 1967 came to an abrupt end. The Arabs proved—even if temporarily—that they were capable of unifying their ranks and winning wars. Equally significant, the Arabs, along with their allies, used oil, for the first time, as an economic weapon. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) reduced its oil production almost bringing the combined economies of Israel's staunch allies to a complete halt. The embargo didn't end until early 1974, while the war officially ended on October 24, 1973. Two days before, major hostilities ceased, the UN passed Resolution 338, calling for an immediate ceasefire, and the implementation of Resolution 242 "in all its parts." Chronicles of war largely differ over the outcome of the fateful military clash of October 1973. While Israel was forced to concede some of its territorial gains in Sinai from the previous war, it lost its military arrogance. Egypt's military resolve during those days convinced both Israel and the United States that the Egyptian card had to be removed from the Arab deck. Cairo was indeed too formidable an opponent. Sadat, on the other hand, was finally accepted as a world statesman, and relations

were established between Washington and Cairo. Kissinger once again was entrusted with a new mission; his goal this time was pacifying Egypt through a long-winded and demoralizing "peace process" and shuttle diplomacy. The ultimate goal was tailoring a new formula for peace that would suit Israel's strategic interests, remove Egypt's cause from that of the Arabs', and relegate the question of Palestine, which was the center of the Arab nationalist struggle of yesteryear.

Mohammed and Zarefah, like the rest of Palestinians in Gaza, listened to their radios in disbelief as the Arabs made their initial advances, and were heartbroken when the US exacted an Israeli comeback in later days. Mohammed did little aside from drinking bitter coffee, and smoking endless cigarettes as he drew closer and closer to his radio, so desperately waiting to hear a word so unfamiliar to Gaza's ears: an Arab victory. By the end of the war, as Egyptians celebrated an indecisive win, Palestinians in Gaza were skeptical. One thing that they knew for sure was that the political outcome of the 1973 war, and the exclusive emphasis on UN Resolution 242 meant the complete disengagement of Egypt from the historic battle for Palestine. Egypt was being sidelined, and Palestinians were expected to join the growing culture of "pragmatism," whose subtle connotation in fact meant surrender.

AN OLIVE BRANCH AND A GUN

The effects of the 1973 war on Gaza were largely psychological. The fact is, Gazans were already under Israeli occupation before the war, and they remained occupied afterwards. Moreover, Gaza was still being "pacified" through various means: violent population transfers, land seizures, assassinations, but also by being offered cheap employment in Israel which created a sense of dependency, and was aimed at fostering a long-term relationship between Gaza and its occupiers. Gaza also lacked a unifying leadership; factions that had survived the repeated Israeli onslaughts were all pushed underground. Fatah was hardly visible in the Strip, and Islamic movements were undergoing various structural adjustments that also made them of little relevance. Israel tried to seize the opportunity of a leadership vacuum by creating its own version of Palestinian leaders, quisling individuals who were propped up by the Israeli military as Gaza's true representatives. Naturally, most Gazans viewed Israel's choice of leadership as collaborators who deserved little respect or loyalty.

Meanwhile, PLO factions were busy fighting their own wars in Lebanon. One could argue that the PLO didn't return to the Occupied Territories as a visible political player until 1976. Before then, PLO factions were recuperating from the devastating war in Jordan, which shattered much of their fighting capabilities, weakened their political structure and created splits within the factions. It was indeed a period of introspection.

The savagery of the Jordan war produced new phenomena that Palestinian groups had avoided in the past. For example, Jordan's Black September—referring to the massacre of thousands of refugees—produced a Palestinian

Black September, a militant group that resorted to international terrorism, for which all Palestinian factions were blamed.

But the period that followed the Jordan war also inspired political turmoil that benefited certain factions within the PLO. In April 1972, King Hussein of Jordan announced the establishment of the United Arab Kingdom on both banks of the Jordan River. However, the move isolated the king regionally, who was accused by Sadat of depriving Palestinians of their self-determination. As Egyptian-Jordanian relations sunk to a new low, Sadat announced his recognition of the "Palestinian resistance."[23] Concurrently, the strong ties between Cairo and Damascus, which purposely coincided with the 1973 war, reflected positively on the PLO, which was politically backed by the former and military aided by the latter. While Sadat's advent to the sanctioned US world of statesmanship was conditional, more or less, on disowning his Soviet allies and adhering to the political culture of "moderation" and "pragmatism," the PLO was expected to do the same. The year 1974 saw the expansion of the PLO from a negligible institution into an internationally recognized organization, whose leaders were propped up to become the sole representatives of the Palestinians. But that too had its price. In June 1974, the Fatah-led PLO revised and approved a political program that adopted a phased political strategy, therefore departing from what Kissinger referred to as the "maximum Arab program." The phased strategy, although remaining committed to establishing a democratic state on the whole of the Palestinian territory, produced a new interim goal, which was "establish[ing] the independent combatant national authority for the people over every part of Palestinian territory that is liberated." That statement represented the end of the PLO's so-called "maximalist position."[24] One could make the argument that the new strategy was not simply the outcome of a new-found realism, but rather a prerequisite that allowed the PLO to exist and politically thrive during an era of hyped emphasis on pragmatism, phased peace process and such. The decision, adopted at the PNC's twelfth conference in Cairo, led to the split of the PLO. The Fatah-led organization turned its focus on political action and international recognition, while the PFLP-led "rejectionist front" split from the PLO and led a smaller group of factions that insisted on armed struggle as the primary path to the liberation of all of Palestine.

Despite the objection of various factions to the PLO's new political program, Arafat and his Fatah-led PLO swiftly rose to prominence. The successive events that took place in 1974, and later months, attest to their unsurpassed ascent. In October 1974, Arabs designated the PLO, at the Rabat summit, as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." A PLO office was opened in Moscow, and Arafat was invited to speak at the UN General Assembly, with the PLO receiving "observer" status. In his speech on November 13, 1974, Arafat stressed the desire for a "common dream [and] a peaceful future in Palestine's sacred land." He exclaimed:

> The PLO has earned its legitimacy because of the sacrifice inherent in its pioneering role, and also because of its dedicated leadership of the

> struggle. It has also been granted this legitimacy by the Palestinian masses, which in harmony with it have chosen it to lead the struggle according to its directives. The PLO has also gained its legitimacy by representing every faction, union or group as well as every Palestinian talent, either in the National Council or in people's institutions. This legitimacy was further strengthened by the support of the entire Arab nation, and it was consecrated during the last Arab Summit Conference, which reiterated the right of the PLO, in its capacity as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, to establish an independent national State on all liberated Palestinian territory. Moreover, the legitimacy of the PLO was intensified as a result of fraternal support given by other liberation movements and by friendly, like-minded nations that stood by our side, encouraging and aiding us in our struggle to secure our national rights. I appeal to you to enable our people to establish national independent sovereignty over its own land … Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. I repeat: do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.[25]

Arafat's speech was historic in the sense that it, after years of reliance and dismissal, earned the Palestinian leadership much-needed and rightfully deserved recognition. However, Arafat's emphasis on the "legitimacy" of the Fatah-led PLO was to define the new course of political action that the PLO had willingly or otherwise chosen for itself. Nonetheless, his words sounded alarms on various fronts. On the one hand, some Palestinians noted the deliberate vagueness in Arafat's statehood proposal, such as "to establish an independent national State on all liberated Palestinian territory," as opposed to Fatah's own previous commitment to a "democratic state on all Palestine."[26] The PLO's phased strategy, as articulated by Arafat, was seen as the early seeds of the Palestinian-Israeli "peace process," which decades later resulted in the failed Oslo Accords. But Israel too was alarmed by the PLO's new-found prestige. Israel had nothing but contempt for the organization and its leadership, and labored to find political alternatives, such as quisling "representatives" willing to speak on behalf of the Palestinians. The heated reception of the PLO internationally was met with greater Israeli resolve to destroy the organization, politically and militarily.

THE NEXT WAR: LEBANON

Lebanon was the opportune place for Israel's designs against the PLO. Israel calculated that even by suppressing PLO supporters in the Occupied Territories, and by pressuring the US to limit the political augmentation of the organization internationally, it would still require the weakening of the PLO's military, social and cultural institutions that were rife and rapidly growing in Lebanon. The civil war that ensued in Lebanon in 1975 represented an opening.

Lebanon's political and social upheaval dates back to the pre-existence of both the PLO and Israel, to the years of French colonialism in the Middle East. In 1920, France separated Lebanon from Greater Syria, which was under French mandate. The country was then run by various Christian sects, who, according to a 1932 census, represented a slight majority.[27] When Lebanon became completely independent in 1945, a political arrangement on how to run the country was reached, where Christian Maronites were given the seat of presidency, Sunnis the premiership, and a Shiite was installed as the speaker of the parliament. Other sects received less consequential positions. However, the parliamentary control ratio still favored Christian sects. The political disparity between the various sects was accentuated economically as well, making Lebanon a hotbed for sectarian strife and violence, which preceded the PLO's arrival in Lebanon by many years. But the PLO's arrival in the early 1970s worsened an already difficult situation. The PLO represented Palestinians, who were largely Sunni Muslims, and its existence and growth in Lebanon complicated the extremely delicate demographic balance. Despite its earlier commitment not to interfere in Lebanon's internal politics, the PLO was quickly drawn in, not least because of the targeting of Palestinian refugees in the country, whom the PLO had sworn to protect. The Lebanon fiasco, however, was not a simple tit-for-tat action, but reflected internal and external balances and calculations. On one hand, the ruling Maronite leadership was greatly challenged by the presence of the PLO, the alliance between the latter and Lebanese opposition groups, and the routine Israeli raids on Lebanese territories, which undermined the Lebanese army's role as a protector of the country. Israel, on the other hand, was determined to eradicate the "terror infrastructure" in Lebanon—that is, the PLO factions—thus using the civil war as an opportunity to intervene in 1976 by arming Christian militias. Moreover, Syria, who also intervened in 1976, did so, first on behalf of the Palestinians, then on behalf of the Maronites, when it appeared that they were losing the fight:

> Damascus's shift was a calculated one. Lebanese ports and banks (owned and controlled mostly by wealthy Christian sects) were critical to the Syrian economy. Maintaining the peace meant keeping a rough balance of power. A return to the status quo, however, was not possible. In the nearly half a century since the 1932 census, the demographics had changed. Maronites were only a third of the population, and Shiites were the single largest bloc. With Muslims demanding proportional representation, the Maronites began to form militias, to secure their interests. The Muslims responded in kind, and the country was soon embroiled in a complicated multifunctional civil war involving the Palestinians as well.[28]

A brief lull in the fighting in 1976 was soon interrupted by violence that engulfed Lebanon for nearly 15 years. In 1978, Israel occupied South Lebanon, driving out thousands of PLO fighters from the area, whose arrival in Beirut shifted the balance of power, altering alliances, and, once again, Syria's position. Tens

of thousands of Lebanese and Palestinian civilian casualties, however, paid the heavy price of the fighting. The 1976 Karantina massacre, carried out by Lebanese Christian militias, alone accounted for over a thousand deaths. The Palestinian Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp, also located in the Karantina district, was placed under a strict siege for seven months, as Christian Phalangist militias backed by Syrian forces escalated its attacks on the camp, reaching a full-scale military assault in August 1976. Several thousand refugees were killed, many starving to death during the siege. Those who survived were marched into Western Beirut, only to be lined up and executed by militias. The camp was completely obliterated afterwards.[29]

The PLO, which continued its fight in Lebanon until the Israeli invasion of the country in the summer of 1982, and the imposition of a "democratic" Lebanese government, was completely distracted from its once-promising political program, in favor of a gruesome war. The war, ultimately, achieved little for the warring parties, except that it fit perfectly into Israel's strategic goal of removing the PLO from South Lebanon, and eventually the country altogether. Israeli forces finally occupied Lebanon in 1982; as PLO fighters were shipped by sea to many countries around the Middle East, a triumphant Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon permitted his Christian Phalangist allies to enter the defenseless Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps. In the days September 16–18, 1982, as Israeli troops completely besieged the camps, the Phalangists entered the area and carried out a massacre that gruesomely defined both the Lebanese civil war and the Israeli invasion; thousands of Palestinian refugees were killed, most of them butchered with knives, but also gunned down, as they pleaded for their lives, and the lives of their loved ones.[30]

KENT: THE LONGER LASTING CIGARETTE

Palestinians in the Occupied Territories watched in complete dismay as PLO factions were once again embroiled, inadvertently or by design, in another bloody Arab conflict; at the same time, Israel was tightening its control over Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. The political prominence gained by the PLO in earlier years was made into a historical footnote as the PLO was battling for its own survival. Elsewhere, Sadat was actively pursuing the path of the "peace process" which focused all diplomatic attention on the Egyptian-Israeli track, largely disregarding the Palestinian context, and eventually relegating the Palestinian conflict altogether.

Mohammed was not just able to hear the news of the Lebanon war—which marginalized both Syria and the PLO—but he and his family was also able to watch the devastation wrought by the war: Mohammed's prosperity had resulted in the purchase of a small black-and-white television set. Since there was no electricity in Gaza, he operated his tiny TV using a giant battery, which he had to haul every few days to a car repair shop to be recharged. Mohammed's political commentary at the time was reduced to a simple mantra, which he often repeated while watching the news as he slapped one hand against the other: "We are lost. We are completely lost." I also recall him

swear every time he saw Anwar Sadat on the news: "You bastard; you sold out for a standing ovation." His fits were often accompanied by throwing his worn-out shoes at the TV screen. Only then, Zarefah would interfere. "Stop, Abu Anwar; stop for goodness sake; will breaking the TV liberate Palestine?" Then, Mohammed would direct his verbal abuse at her, then at God, Sadat, Arafat, all Arabs, Christians and Muslims, and eventually at himself, and storm out, but not without his pack of Kent "King Size" cigarettes, because they lasted longer.

9
Strange Men at the Beach Casino

I was often summoned by my father to perform, and at the age of four, my performance consisted of one simple joke and a song. The song, which I had claimed as my own work, was actually taught to me by one of my uncles. The joke, which I performed numerous times, at my father's urgings, went something like this: "When a cross-eyed man cried, his tears fell into his ears." The joke, surprisingly, always invited much laughter. I was wearing my red suit, a prized matching jacket and trousers that my mother had designed copying a famous Palestinian singer's suit. This local celebrity, popular for his long hair and glitzy moves, often performed at weddings and circumcision parties. When my father announced that the famous singer was to perform at my brothers' and my circumcision party, which would follow the public circumcision of four of us, refugees came in droves, from neighboring areas and others, as far away as Gaza City itself. For obvious reasons, I couldn't wear my slightly snug red trousers and special matching jacket that day, but it became my most precious possession for years to come, even when it no longer fit me.

Unlike the circumcision party, my father's latest gathering was not quite so public, and initially it was shrouded in secrecy. There was no band, no singers in red suits, but instead respectable-looking gentlemen in elegant jackets and ties, some wearing religious garb, both Christian and Muslim. The gathering place was not a large makeshift tent in an open area outside my house by the graveyard, as often was the case for public celebrations, but the Nuseirat Beach Casino. Of course, it was not a casino in the expected sense, that is, with slot machines, cocktails and the rest. Instead, it was an open concrete platform, surrounded by low walls, and positioned atop a small hill that faced the sea. It was shaded with dried palm branches which danced with the slightest breeze. The casino was surrounded by grapevines, and fig and palm trees. But everything looked different on that day. All the tables and chairs were removed and replaced with fancy mattresses, pillows with elaborate colors and rarely used rugs, which were assembled to mimic an "Arabic-style" living room. Even the food was different; delicacies had been ordered from a special shop in Gaza City, a place famous for cooking a traditional dish of rice, meat, spices and nuts in clay jars, which were then broken open before the guests to display the succulent treasures inside.

Nonetheless, I was consumed by the pressure of having to, yet again, repeat my redundant joke and lone song. I was invited into the middle of the circle. "Do your song," my father ordered, as many serious-looking men quieted their heated discussions, as if awaiting the address of a great orator. Afraid of my

father's wrath, I started, "Sasasa Mamama, my hair is long, oh, mama, can you please cut it, oh, mama, haaaay!" Terribly pressured by the whole occasion, and my father's commanding looks, and fearing that the entertainment might have not met expectations, I burst into tears the moment I finished, but I was promptly comforted by a thoughtful guest, who insisted that I must sit beside him throughout the whole lunch. It was a pleasant experience, after all, for I sat beside Bassam Shakaa, who along with a group of bold nationalists, had managed to keep the presence of the PLO alive in the West Bank and Gaza despite every Israeli attempt at marginalizing the organization.

But what were Bassam Shakaa, Karim Khalaf, Audeh Rantisi and a large number of PLO nationalists, religious clergy, and West Bank and Gaza academicians doing in the Nuseirat Beach Casino that day?

THE ELECTIONS THAT BACKFIRED

In 1976, the Israeli government, then led by Yitzhak Rabin, conducted local elections in the West Bank and Gaza. It was a classic Rabin move, aimed at stripping the PLO of any validity in the Occupied Territories.[1] Israel had by then made up another group of Palestinian "leaders," which consisted mostly of traditional heads of clans, a small, self-seeking oligarchy that historically accommodated whatever foreign power happened to be ruling over Palestinians at the time. But Israel was almost certain that its allies were ready to sweep the local elections. For one, the PLO was browbeaten and fragmented in Lebanon, and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, subjected to ten years of total dependency and violence, were duly "pacified." But there was more to that Israeli self-assurance. In 1972, Israel had carried out similar elections, which allowed only males aged 21 and older who owned property or paid wealth tax, to vote.[2] Predictably, the earlier vote was cast in favor of the traditional elites, who, along with their chosen voters had mutual interests in mind. But things had changed since the first elections. One reason for that change was that by 1976, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories had overcome their fear of the mighty and unapproachable Israel; they were additionally empowered, if not inspired, by the largely positive international attention that the PLO was enjoying. Moreover, Palestinians were finally united and organized around the Palestinian National Front (PNF), founded in 1973, comprising all Palestinian groups and national tendencies and growing in popularity. The PNF was known for its similar political outlooks to those of the PLO.[3] The PLO had officially refused to recognize the elections of 1976 as they were conducted under Israeli occupation; however, it left the final decision to the PNF, who agreed to participate. The PNF's unanticipated decision invited Israeli retaliation, harassment, arrests, and the deportation of two PNF members.[4]

Israel's miscalculation in 1976 was a rude awakening for both its military and political leaderships, whose plans had officially faltered when the results were revealed. PNF candidates won an overwhelming majority, sweeping 148 of the 191 mayoralties and councillorships. Karim Khalaf was elected mayor of Ramallah. His deputy was Audeh Rantisi. Bassam Shakaa, the big

fan of my terrible performance at the Casino, was elected mayor of Nablus. Israel fumed. Khalaf commented: "We are for the PLO, and we say this in our electoral speeches. This is our main electoral issue. The people who come along to our meetings do not ask about road improvements and new factories; we want an end to occupation."[5]

The growing pro-PLO sentiment in the West Bank and Gaza was met by a similar sentiment among Palestinians in Israel, who had long been labeled and dismissed as "Israeli Arabs," hence removed from any Palestinian political context.[6] Land Day was declared in 1976, and ever since commemorated on March 30 in Arab towns inside Israel, in protest at an Israeli government decision to confiscate thousands of acres of Palestinian land. Six Palestinians were killed and many wounded and jailed during the confrontation between Palestinian protestors and Israeli army and police forces.[7] The clear nationalist position articulated in the elections of 1976, and the mass mobilization in Palestinian towns and villages within Israel once again highlighted that the struggle was of a political nature, pertaining to lands and rights, and that "pacified" Palestinians were in no mood to coexist with the Israeli occupation.

But violence was to return to the Occupied Territories as well. The failure of the newest Israeli maneuver had to be compensated for by violent mass suppression, and rapid moves on the ground to ensure that the PLO didn't rule the West Bank and Gaza through the nationalist mayors and their municipalities. All sorts of messages were quickly dispatched by the Israeli government; army and settler movements were mobilized to control the situation. Gush Emunim marched in the West Bank calling for "Eretz Israel," and Palestinians responded with mass protests. The Israeli army interfered, as was often the case, on behalf of the settlers, killing several Palestinians and wounding others. The killings, which included two children, widened the scope of the protests to include most of Gaza. Mohammed wore his red nationalist *kuffiya* and joined the thousands of protesters who expressed in their chants the popular political views of the time: rejecting autonomy, the Jordanian option, the Israeli occupation and normalization with Israel, calling for unity around the PLO and denouncing the collaborators, the traditional elites to whom Israel insisted on granting power as Palestinian representatives.

WINDS OF CHANGE

Understanding the events of the late 1970s is essential to comprehending the change in the political composition of Palestinian society in the Occupied Territories. These were the years when Gaza and the West Bank were no longer viewed as two separate geographical and political entities, but united, thanks to the PNF and the rebellious mayors, by one common leadership. This in turn empowered the PLO, which up until that time had obtained its legitimacy from Arab regimes or international organizations. The PLO was seen as the leadership of a real mass of people, capable of articulating their views via democratic elections and mass mobilization. Things were indeed

changing in the Occupied Territories, a change that would have not been possible without the thousands of Mohammeds and Zarefahs that faced Israeli tanks with bared chests, closed fists and one imposing voice.

But things were also changing in Israel itself, as the Labor Party, after 30 years of power, lost in an election upset to the right-wing Likud Party. The political change in Israel was attributed, among other internal factors, to the economic recession of that period and ethnic politics (Sephardim vs. Ashkenazi), which was played upon well by Likud leader Menachem Begin. As far as Palestinians were concerned, however, Likud signified a continuation of Labor policies, which aimed at entrenching the occupation, exploiting Palestinian resources (largely human resources and West Bank water aquifers) and building more settlements. The difference, if any, was in the language, for the Occupied Territories were now seen as "Judea and Samaria" by the official institution itself, not just right-wing and religious movements. Moreover, the speed of land theft also accelerated dramatically under Likud, whose settlement project was not merely directed to achieve military and strategic goals, but reflected the government's genuine intentions of never withdrawing from the Occupied Territories. Begin's name was particularly menacing among Palestinians, for he was the Polish immigrant to Israel who led the Irgun terror gang, whose name was affiliated to, amongst many atrocities carried out in 1948 and earlier years, with the Deir Yassin massacre.[8] As for Begin's political agenda, following Likud's election victory in 1977, it was indisputably clear: "The Jewish people have an unchallengeable, eternal, historic right to the Land of Israel (including the West Bank and Gaza Strip), the inheritance of their forefathers."[9] Hence, he pledged to "build rural and urban exclusive Jewish colonies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip":[10]

> Settlement of the West Bank, and to a lesser extent Gaza, was part of Likud's strategic plan to make sure no inch of Israeli territory would ever be surrendered. By establishing a large population in the Occupied Territories, it hoped to render politically unviable any future efforts by a Labor government to evacuate the territory.[11]

Empowered on one hand by the rise of a unifying leadership in the Occupied Territories that tied its political decision to the PLO abroad, yet overwhelmed by the political upheaval in Israel, whose outcome would kill any hope, however faint, that Israel had the slightest intentions of returning to the pre-1967 border, Palestinians teetered between hope and despair.

THE PRINCE OF THE PEACE PROCESS

But nothing was to prepare Palestinians for the visit by Anwar Sadat to Israel, in November 1977. Sadat was received by Begin at Ben Gurion Airport with a 21-gun salute in his honor. On the following day, Sadat delivered a speech before the Israeli Knesset. He told Israeli parliamentarians, "We really and truly welcome you to live among us in peace and security."[12] Because of

Sadat's unilateral move, and not least because of the nominal mention of Palestinians in his speeches at the time, and the similarly symbolic references to the Palestinian issue in later agreements between Egypt and Israel, Palestinians realized that the leading Arab nation was no longer a party in their struggle. Gazans were particularly disheartened by the development, as Egypt, long seen as the protector of Gaza, was now apparently at "peace" with Israel through an agreement that essentially overlooked the Palestinians. The Strip, once regarding Egyptian territories as its strategic depth became but a tiny pocket of land, politically and territorially isolated between two enormous "peace partners." Sadat's calculated overture was followed by the Camp David Accords in 1978, and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty signed by Sadat and Begin in Washington, DC, in March 1979. Sadat, once again, managed to upgrade his political status. He was no longer just an up-and-coming statesman, acknowledged as such by Western powers, but a peacemaker, a "prince of peace" even, as labeled by US evangelical preacher Pat Robertson.[13] Sadat and Begin were celebrated as champions for peace and were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1978; for Gazans, Palestinians and most Arabs, there was little to celebrate. Kissinger's unceasing mission to divide the Arab front had finally paid off. Sadat's Nobel acceptance speech reflected his great and rising sense of his own prominence that permeated his every act during those months:

> Let us put an end to wars, let us reshape life on the solid basis of equity and truth. And it is this call, which reflected the will of the Egyptian people, of the great majority of the Arab and Israeli peoples, and indeed of millions of men, women, and children around the world that you are today honoring. And these hundreds of millions will judge to what extent every responsible leader in the Middle East has responded to the hopes of mankind.[14]

Sadat also made mention of Palestinians:

> The peace process comprises a beginning and steps towards an end. In reaching this end the process must achieve its projected goal. That goal is to bring security to the peoples of the area, and the Palestinians in particular, restoring to them all their right to a life of liberty and dignity. We are moving steadily towards this goal for all the peoples of the region. This is what I stand for. This is the letter and the spirit of Camp David.[15]

But the "hopes of mankind" and the "spirit of Camp David" represented nothing more than a sentimental, although fleeting reference to the original conflict between the Arabs and Israel. As Sadat masked his new political program with trivial references, Israel was clear in regard to its future and territorial agendas, of which Sadat must have also been aware. As Egypt and Israel were capitalizing on Sadat's historic visit and prepared for the future peace treaty, Israel sent 25,000 soldiers to occupy South Lebanon in Operation Litani, on March 14, 1978, a move that also exacerbated the Lebanese civil

war. The Israeli attack on Lebanon was justified as retaliation for an attack by a Palestinian group on an Israeli bus in Haifa, which killed and wounded scores of Israelis.[16] Politically, Begin was hardly misleading when he declared, during the Israeli-Egyptian peace negotiations, his intentions regarding the future of the Occupied Territories:

> Israel will not transfer Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza District to any foreign sovereign authority, [because] of the historic right of our nation to this land, [and] the needs of our national security, which demand a capability to defend our State and the lives of our citizens.[17]

But Sadat was not the prince of peace as far as Gaza was concerned. He had merely corroborated the "peace process" as a viable channel that would strategically strengthen Israel, further disunite the Arabs and isolate the Palestinian leadership. Camp David freed Israel's hand to do as it saw fit in the Occupied Territories and Lebanon, without fearing any serious consequences, now that Egypt was no longer a party in the conflict.

BLAMING THE MESSENGER

My father, who was once a fighter in an Egyptian army unit, and later a member of a PLA brigade administered by Egypt, felt particularity betrayed. His love for Nasser was retrospectively renewed, and his hatred for Sadat reached the point of questioning his decision to name his eldest son "Anwar." But he also grew angry, and intolerant of his own surroundings; his frequent verbal abuse of Zarefah turned physical. Zarefah would leave him at times and move back to her mother's, but would soon return, out of love, pity, or perhaps both. Their joint struggle was a testament to their love, but his angry fits, which often escalated into physical abuse, were the red line that Mohammed began to cross, and frequently. The signing of the Camp David Accords resulted in Zarefah fleeing to her mother's house, this time for weeks. Mohammed was left alone with his anger and regret. That's when the mailman of the Nuseirat Post Office, nicknamed "Fouad al-Bis" (Fouad the Cat), delivered a sealed official letter to Mohammed; the letter was from a Gazan mayor who was seen as a collaborator with Israel. Fouad was nicknamed "the Cat" because he was a very short man, whose height was an endless subject of ridicule around the refugee camp. He wore a black suit and a tie, and a Sherlock Holmes "deerstalker" hat as he delivered letters, riding on a child-sized bicycle through the camp's dusty streets. He handed the letter to Mohammed with a smirk. "You are an important man, Abu Anwar," he said. Mohammed didn't understand the insinuation until he opened the letter to find a personal invitation to join a Gaza delegation to be dispatched to Egypt to congratulate Sadat on Camp David's "historic achievement." Mohammed's world suddenly came crashing down on him as all the disconcerting images of the past gushed into his head: the wars, the defeats, the struggles, the refugee camp, his son's grave, poverty, Sadat shaking Begin's hand, bruised

Zarefah running to her mother's, and now a tiny, smirking mailman with some strange insinuations. It must have been a most bizarre scene for Mohammed's neighbors to behold, as in a frenzy, Mohammed chased after Fouad the Cat. Fouad abandoned his bike, yet still tightly clutched his precious hat, and ran as fast as his little legs would carry him, urging anyone to come to his rescue.

Mohammed was losing every fiber of patience that allowed him to survive during the most difficult of years. He was no longer interested in keeping a low profile and finding compromises. The Camp David Accords had inspired the rise of a new movement in Gaza and the West Bank, and Mohammed was to join it.

In October 1978, the nationalist mayors, joined by town councilors and various nationalist institutions, began a campaign of mass mobilization under the umbrella of the National Leadership Committee, whose main objective was to challenge Camp David and the political consequences of marginalizing Palestinians.[18] The movement was the most elaborate and united network of Palestinians ever assembled in the Occupied Territories. Israel immediately cracked down on the mayors, union leaders and nationalists of various professional institutions. Thus, when Mohammed invited representatives of the movement to the Nuseirat Beach Casino for a special meeting, the message intended was daring and clear: the West Bank and Gaza are united. That unity was hardly inspired or strengthened by my tragic performance and joke about the cross-eyed man, but the fact that I sat by Bassam Shakaa was a particular honor.

Shakaa and other mayors were targeted for assassination by Israeli intelligence and extremist Jewish groups for organizing and leading Palestinian civil society against the Camp David Accords, the theft of Palestinian land and water, and every other plot. On July 2, 1980, a bomb blew up Shakaa's car.[19] The bomb failed to kill the mayor of Nablus but cost him both of his legs. His response was framed in Mohammed's living room for years: "They may take my legs, but they cannot pull up my roots."[20] Karim Khalaf was also crippled in a bombing, losing one of his legs.

Camp David, the attempts to eliminate the nationalist leaders in the Occupied Territories, and the increasing violence of Jewish extremists in the West Bank inspired more mass protests, general strikes and violent confrontations between Palestinian youths and Israeli forces. In November 1981, the Israeli government moved to dismiss the elected West Bank mayors, shortly after it established a "civilian administration" to rule the Occupied Territories directly, through its military.[21] The Civilian Administration was aimed at sidelining any truly representative Palestinian leadership, and further cementing the occupation. Palestinians responded with a general strike and mass mobilization. Pro-PLO chants echoed daily in the Nuseirat refugee camp, as well as across the rest of the Occupied Territories. The daily protests were no longer exclusive to refugees in refugee camps, however, but extended to middle-class professionals within urban centers in Gaza City and elsewhere. The traditional elite also lost whatever semblance of power they had claimed

when Israel took over the municipalities. The mayor of Gaza City, Rashad Shawa, was also removed from his post in July 1982.[22]

The two movements—the nationalists and the elites—that, to varying degrees, influenced Palestinian society in Gaza and the West Bank, were being modified, whether by public opinion, Israeli army decrees, or by bullets and car bombs. The protests and clashes that grew fiercer during those years, also gave rise to a new generation of resisters, the *shabab* or youth culture. They were the new product of the PLO-inspired nationalist movement that grew out of the 1976 elections. The *shabab* consisted of mostly students but also included laborers in Israel. Their frequent clashes with Israeli soldiers and regular contact with Israeli society helped them break the sense of fear that had long governed Arab attitudes towards the dreaded state.

Israel was never to give up on trying to mold local Palestinian leaders as alternatives to elected Palestinians or internationally recognized representatives of the Palestinian struggle. Begin upgraded the nature of his alternative leadership when in 1978, he established the Village Leagues, giving its members relatively wide powers, including the approval or denial of developmental projects in the Occupied Territories. Begin armed the Village Leagues and also provided them with Israeli military protection. But this too was doomed to fail:

> The league members [were] widely regarded as collaborators by their fellow townspeople and villagers. [By 1983] Israel had begun recognizing the artificial nature of the Village Leagues and acknowledged the failure of the efforts to create political institutions capable of mobilizing Palestinian support for the occupation and the Likud government's vision of autonomy.[23]

Yet again another ploy was thwarted, as the Israeli government decided in March 1984 to dissolve the Village Leagues. However, similar to the everlasting affects of the 1976 elections, as well as the formation of the Palestinian National Front and the National Leadership Committee in shaping the rebellious views of the youth generation of the 1980's in Gaza and the West Bank, the Israeli leadership's concoction also left its mark. The collaborating culture of the "moderates" was later to pay the ultimate price of physical elimination by the youth culture, a clash that invited many bloody episodes during the Palestinian uprising of the late 1980s.

MOHAMMED AND THE SHABAK

When Israel established its military Civilian Administration in Gaza in 1981, Palestinians in the Strip were in daily contact with the Israeli military, which oversaw every aspect of Gazan life, with no Palestinian proxies required. The Israeli military used the classic carrot and stick treatment to reward accommodating Gazans and to punish troublemakers.

Gaza, in the meantime, was still reeling from the psychological affects of Camp David and the physical affects of the widespread clashes that engulfed

the Strip during the confrontations and general strikes of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Armed resistance was either completely eradicated or had gone into hiding. However, news of freedom fighters killed in gunfights with Israeli army units would still surface from time to time. Mohammed, although a community organizer, still believed in armed struggle; after all, he was once a fighter himself. The graveyard by Mohammed's house was a popular spot for fighters, for its high elevation allowed them to monitor the movement of the Israeli army at the outskirts of the camp, between Nuseirat and Buraij refugee camps. Mohammed and Zarefah often brought food, cigarettes and blankets to the young fighters, who would hide for hours between the graves, grasping tightly on their rifles while wearing their trademark *kuffiyas*.

Although Mohammed's days as a fighter were long gone, his fighting spirit was rekindled with the emergence of the nationalist leadership that took Gaza and the West Bank by storm. He too was taking his place in the trenches, for he emerged as a leading voice that called for civil disobedience and boycott of the Israeli Civilian Administration in Gaza's central refugee camps. Mohammed's notable invitation to West Bank dignitaries and his growing activism calling for a boycott against Israel once again found his profile as an agitator on an Israeli officer's desk.

The Israeli intelligence in Gaza was operated by the Shabak, commonly known as Shin Bet, one of Israel's three intelligence branches, the other two being the military intelligence of the IDF and Mossad. Shabak officers gave themselves Arabic-sounding names, similar to the *noms de guerre* held by various PLO officials and militants. The practice was not intended for mere mockery alone, but because it protected the Israeli officers' identities. Considering the widespread torture which was a common and state-sanctioned practice by the Shabak against Palestinian suspects, operating under assumed identities was a protective measure from possible acts of retribution. But these fake identities were also given comical twists. Famous amongst the leading Shabak officers that operated in Gaza in those years were Abu Assad ("father of the lion"), and Abu Fahd ("father of the cheetah"). They both spoke fluent Arabic, and knew the weak spots in Gaza's communities, knowledge that they utilized proficiently during interrogations. Both men were also quick to learn of Mohammed's troubling activities. When Abu Fahd initially invited Mohammed to a "friendly meeting" in his office in Deir al-Balah, a small town adjacent to Nuseirat, they had an interesting exchange, which went something like this, according to my father's narrative:

"Tell me about yourself, Mohammed? What was your major at the university?"

"I have a fourth-grade education."

"You want to convince me that you are leading a socialist revolution in Nuseirat with a fourth-grade education?"

"I am not trying to convince you of anything. You asked me and I answered."

"Mohammed, I don't want to hate you. In fact, you are an intelligent man, and I feel that we can be good friends."

"Oh, so you are looking to expand on your Village Leagues' friendships?"

"Mohammed, you are getting on my nerves."

"That is something that honors me, getting on the nerves of Abu Fahd. How is your son, Fahd, by the way?"

"Mohammed, you must already know of the horrible things I can do to you and your family. Do you know that you could leave my office today in a coffin?"

"Sure, I do. I live by the Martyrs Graveyard and I have seen the many young men who were brought there in coffins because of you and your army. But you don't scare me."

"If you are not scared for your own safety, you must worry about Zarefah, Suma, Anwar and your other children."

Then, Mohammed chuckled and uttered insults that would send Abu Fahd into a rage and resulted in Mohammed being thrown out of the Shabak's office: "You think you will intimidate me by recounting the names of my wife and children. Just give me 24 hours and I will come back to you with the names of your family, neighbors, pets and the guys that your wife has been cheating on you with in Tel Aviv while you are here torturing, murdering and terrorizing refugees."

Following that encounter, Mohammed was confined to the Gaza Strip for over a year, neither allowed to venture to Israel for work, nor to Egypt or anywhere else. That year gave Mohammed more time to organize his community in the face of the Israeli Civilian Administration, and the frequent encounters with Israeli intelligence gave him all sorts of stories to share with the amused refugees, who, for once, were no longer intimidated by Israeli intelligence officers, their comical names and formidable army.

THE NEW SOCIETY

Gazan society was growing ever more resentful. Gaza never intended to coexist with the Israeli occupation, but the fact that the occupation failed to break Gaza's will (and that of Palestinians elsewhere) for many years was a tribute to the tenacity of the people. In fact, Palestinians were becoming more significant as a "people," as opposed to individual leaders or factions—for it was their collective action that prevented every attempt at discounting or marginalizing the Palestinian struggle. Gaza's collective action in the mid-1950s, the refusal to be subdued and defeated in the 1960s, and the rise of the popular leadership of the 1970s were all experiences that culminated to shape a collective view of a new, self-assured generation, that no longer looked to an Egyptian, or any other Arab leader to defeat Israel. Camp David made it clear that Palestinians were responsible for staging their own resistance, fighting their own battles, and ultimately winning their own war of liberation.

Moreover, the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1982, the massacres that accompanied and followed the onslaught, and the departure of PLO factions to various countries, helped shift the role of Gaza and the West Bank, from complementing the PLO's resistance abroad (as was the case in 1976 and

following years), to one that would eventually shift the battle in its entirety to the Occupied Territories. The PLO, which was expelled from every significant territory that bordered Israel, was obliged to accept the new leading role of the young leadership in Gaza and the West Bank. Ironically, roles were reversed as the traditional PLO leadership extended, in the mid- and late 1980s, its own relevance from the *shabab*, who were now the new vanguard, facing Israeli tanks, tortured in Israeli jails, and mobilizing Palestinian society for another imminent confrontation, which was actualized in 1987 in the form of the *Intifada*, the Uprising.

But the new society in Gaza didn't express itself entirely through PLO channels, or communicate exclusively through the nationalist rhetoric that permeated Palestinian society for a generation. There was a new faction that was introduced, or reintroduced to the mix, one that had its own separate and unique history, ideological framework and forms of expression. This other new society was neither PLO affiliated nor was it another Israeli invention, like the traditional elite, the Village Leagues and the like. It was the new generation of the politically long-dormant Islamic movement, which was itself an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood of decades ago. That movement continued to exist in various shapes and forms. Its newest ascension of the early to mid-1980s was assisted by various factors. One was the departure of the PLO from Lebanon, and the rise of new local leaderships in Gaza and the West Bank; this development represented an opportunity for political and social growth. The Israeli intelligence service was, of course, watching the new Islamic society as it evolved, at times parallel with, but mostly in opposition to, the PLO nationalist culture. Such an evolution also presented Israel with an opportunity to ignite a serious clash between two formidable and popular narratives: the Islamists vs. the nationalists.

A DISTRESS CALL

The speakers mounted atop the mosque's giant minaret crackled as they always did before an imposing voice made the call for prayer. But the call that was made on that afternoon was not the familiar one, which echoes five times a day. Zarefah recalled the bitter story, for she was one of the very unfortunate witnesses to the panic that commenced. It was an urgent call for help: "People of Nuseirat: We implore you to descend on to the Islamic University of Gaza to stop the bloodletting. Your sons' and daughters' lives are in danger." The call was made several times through the refugee camp's main mosque, but it quickly spread to the rest of the area's mosques. Hundreds of distressed people, including families with students at the Islamic University ran through the streets, as taxis, trucks and buses began hauling refugees to the university. The bloodletting was not Israel's doing this time, but resulted from clashes between student supporters of the PLO and others who identified with Islamic groups. Israeli forces were stationed around the university, but did nothing to stop the clashes, where knives, heavy chains and other fighting tools (though no firearms) were readily employed. Zarefah stood outside the house, sobbing

and pleading, not knowing what course of action to follow, especially with her husband absent. Eventually, she resolved to join the crowd, which approached the university to beseech the fighting parties to desist. To understand the bloody fight, one must review its political and social contexts.

BEFORE HAMAS

The defeat of 1967, then the occupation of the Gaza Strip—among other Palestinian and Arab lands—was all that the Islamic movement in Gaza needed to appreciate the gravity of the new situation. It argued that armed struggle was not possible under the current power structure and that for such a struggle to be successful, it would require more than firearms: it would require the engagement of all sections of society. Instead of battling Israeli forces, the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Gaza focused on society-building and the espousing of an Islamic generation that would be willing and capable to withstand the future confrontation. As Gaza underwent various stages of growth and evolvement, from the secretive, underground resistance phase, to that of collective and open struggle—exemplified in the protracted strike of November 1981—the Islamic movement was also evolving, but based largely on separate dialectics, unique to its own political agendas, and internal debates. Despite that exceptionality, however, internal (as in Palestinian) and external (as in regional and international) factors also had a role to play in the changes experienced in Islamic circles.

The years 1967–75 were designated by the Islamic movement as the phase of mosque building.[24] The mosque was the central institution that galvanized Islamic societies in Gaza. It was not simply a place of worship but also a hub for education, social and cultural interaction, and later, political organization. In the period 1967–87, the number of mosques in Gaza had tripled, rising from 200 to 600 mosques.[25] The years between 1975 and the mid-1980s were dubbed the phase of social institution building, which included the formation of Islamic clubs, charitable organizations, student societies, and so on, which all served as meeting points for Muslim youths.[26] Funding for all of these projects and networks was partly provided by the membership dues of the various Islamic societies who served as fronts for the Islamic movement. But much of the money was also provided by wealthy Palestinians and Arabs in the Gulf, who greatly benefited from oil wealth, and, as devout Muslims, are always urged to use some of their wealth to finance mosques, schools and charities. Around the same period, the religious institution in Gaza owned hundreds of shops, apartments, public buildings and other properties, and provided employment to hundreds of Palestinians.[27] That growth demanded a system that would order and regulate the movement's many facets of operation, a power structure that would allow the societal expansion to be utilized politically, at the opportune time.

In 1973, the Islamic Center was established in Gaza. It was widely understood that the center was a continuation of the Muslim Brotherhood of the past. Israel purposely did little to halt the establishment of the organization, as

it also did little to assist it in its growth. Israel's curious attitude could be explained as part of its policy of reward and punishment. Since the Islamists had renounced armed struggle and were providing social services which saved the Israeli budget many millions, there seemed little need to discontinue what at the time may have seemed like innocuous activities. But more importantly, Israel was wary of the augmentation of PLO institutions abroad and growing influence on Palestinian societies in the Occupied Territories. Thus, the Islamic Center in Gaza seemed a reasonable distraction from the PLO's troubling rhetoric. But Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the head of the Islamic Brotherhood in Gaza, had other ideas in mind. For him, the Islamic Center was merely the platform for the commencement of an even wider Islamic awakening, which was meant to translate into collective resistance against the Israeli occupation. In 1976, he founded the Islamic Society in Gaza, and two years later, as the Islamic network grew to unprecedented levels, he helped establish the Islamic Compound. The latest addition to the Muslim Brotherhood organizational structures coincided with the rise of the nationalist mayors of 1976, and the open confrontations between Palestinians, sympathetic to the PLO, and Israeli occupation forces in later years. While Sheikh Yassin was simply following a structural growth pattern, based on a timeline that had been previously determined, Israel sought to capitalize on the rising popularity of the Islamic movement in Gaza, hoping that the passive Islamists would eventually turn the tide against confrontational nationalists. Therefore, when Islamic movement members sought an Israeli license to establish the Compound, they received approval in the matter of two hours.[28] However, the Israeli consent was soon withdrawn, and then again reinstated,[29] which reflected a level of Israeli uncertainty, and perhaps fear, that the new social structure might itself become a political structure.

But the Muslim Brotherhood's advances in Gaza were not to go unchallenged. On one hand, Israel was careful not to permit any activities by the Islamists that could be interpreted as a threat, no matter how trivial, to Israeli security. On the other hand, the PLO, although weakened regionally and internationally—by the Lebanon civil war, Camp David and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978, and again in 1982—was stronger than ever in the Occupied Territories, for the latter was the only claim at relevance the PLO was left with in its confrontation with Israel. The PLO was making headway in the Occupied Territories, and was neither ready nor willing to accommodate any competition over the role as the "sole" representative of the Palestinian people. The simultaneous rise of the PLO and the Islamic movement in Gaza was not necessarily calculated, but it would appear so, considering the rapid evolvement of two separate narratives and claims at legitimacy, under the watchful eye of the Israeli army and intelligence.

The early 1980s saw a major transformation in the ranks of the Islamic movement, from a largely non-violent and apolitical movement, to exactly the opposite. That transformation was not immediate, and was a result, in part, of the planned evolution, determined as early as 1967:

> The role of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood … was three fold: cadre formation and mobilization, passive resistance, and military action. Cadre formation and mobilization refer to creating organized support of the Brotherhood, basically through Islamic student organizations and electoral contests. Passive resistance refers to the Islamic participation in some mass demonstrations and political protests, such as the strike by the medical society in the Gaza Strip on November 26, 1981, which coincided with a comprehensive twenty-one day general strike in the entire Gaza Strip … [Muslim Brotherhood activists] also participated in the 1983 protest demonstration commemorating the first anniversary of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and in the demonstrations at Bir Zeit University [in the West Bank] to protest the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Two student members of the Islamic bloc were killed.[30]

The third phase mentioned in the quotation above was that of military action. The Israeli army arrested Sheikh Yassin and a few of his colleagues in 1984 on charges of possessing arms and plotting military attacks against Israeli occupation forces. Those arrests and a few other minor clashes between Islamic activists and Israeli troops were seen as the advent of the third phase of the Islamic struggle in Gaza. However, there was little indication, aside from these events, that would point to a serious inclination towards military action on part of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza. Nonetheless, these events underlined the consequential debate within the movement. Clashing with Israel was not an easily reversible move, which could result in the eradication of the entire society and its reasonably sophisticated, but certainly elaborate, structure. But what the Islamic leadership also kept in mind was that further delays could hamper the movement's credibility amongst its members, and allow the PLO to claim leadership status uncontested. In fact, in the early 1980s, a new splinter movement was on the rise in Gaza: the Islamic Jihad, a movement that proved particularly poignant to the Islamic Brotherhood. On one hand, the Islamic Jihad—whose members had been at one point supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood—subscribed to Islamic ideology and principles, and on the other resorted to armed resistance as a means to satisfy these principles. That breakup of the Islamic movement challenged the phased strategy which the traditional Muslim Brotherhood leadership had used to rationalize its lack of involvement in political and armed struggle. But other factors were also important, notwithstanding the Iranian revolution and the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, which presented tangible proof that an Islamic state based on mass mobilization was indeed possible.[31] All these factors combined to excite and agitate some leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza, who worried that further delays in upgrading their program could jeopardize the entire Islamic revival project underway:

> [The Brotherhood] had fallen short in putting off jihad, which made it possible for secular, nationalist, and communist organizations to get ahead of it … it was the absence of the Islamic movement from the field that

> allowed the revolutionary organizations to outstrip it, organizations which the Brotherhood berates for their leftist leanings, their deviation, their bungling and for brainwashing the youth.[32]

That frustrated narrative was met with an equally aggravated account, presented by the PLO nationalists:

> It's evident that the organizational and political problems inside and outside the Occupied Territories have been one of the main factors for the growth of the irrational religious trends which now threaten to divide the people in these territories. The growth of these trends began after the mid-seventies, exactly when the bureaucratic apparatus of the PLO was formed and completed.[33]

Whether religious trends are rational or otherwise, the fact was that the growth, shifts and evolution of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, in all its manifestations in the Gaza Strip, followed a rational process that was unique to Gaza and its history. No other place in Palestine was as qualified to spawn a major Islamic movement as was the Gaza Strip. The Strip was poor and its population was mostly composed of refugees and their descendants. Islamist leaders were themselves refugees and were mostly refugee camp dwellers. The Strip was historically more conservative and isolated than the West Bank, for example. Its only true opening to the outside world was through Egypt. Gaza's poverty and conservatism, its access to universities and political opposition forces in Egypt and the historical ties between the Islamic movement of Egypt to that of Gaza and thus to the conflict in Palestine, all helped generate in Gaza a thriving Islamic movement, which was destined to clash with the Israeli occupation. That impending clash was to take place in 1987, in the form of the Intifada, or Uprising. But the Intifada in Gaza was also a field of competition between, on one hand, Islamic and nationalist movements and Israeli occupation forces, and on the other between the supporters of the PLO and Islamic factions. The fact remained that most of the Israeli army's victims during the Intifada were unarmed Palestinian youth, some of whom were buried in Nuseirat refugee camp's Martyrs Graveyard, near Anwar's little mound of dirt and now-giant cactus, which marked the headstone.

CHOOSING POVERTY

But the future, initially, was not looking entirely bleak for Mohammed and his family. By the mid-1980s, Mohammed and Zarefah now had six children. Suma had grown into a beautiful woman, and was dispatched to Aleppo, Syria to study medicine. The rest, five boys, including myself, were also maturing and had garnered a reputation around the camp as being particularly studious. Mohammed had accumulated some wealth based on his business dealings in Israel, as his trade projects expanded to include thread, textiles and even grain and wheat flour. He invested all his income in ensuring that his children

would receive the best possible education that a refugee camp could offer. "I am willing to sell my blood to buy you books and whatever supplies you need for school. All I need from you is to study as hard as you can," he would often say, as he urged us to our studies. His frequent and prolonged lectures about the value of education reflected his inherent sense of inadequacy if compared to his other brothers who all enjoyed promising careers, based on their education in wealthy Gulf countries. But his emphasis on educating his only daughter, even if at the expense of the boys, was a unique phenomenon in Gaza. True, the Islamic University (established in 1978 as another platform for the Islamic movement) was a badly needed venue for girls who wished to pursue college degrees, but sending one's daughter to Syria, on her own, was not a typical occurrence. However Mohammed's decisions, in his late forties, were as rebellious as his choices of younger years. "If I had to choose between educating Suma alone or educating my five boys, excluding Suma, I would choose the former over the latter," he would pronounce to admiring friends with unmistakable gratification. He knew that Suma's chances as a woman in a male-dominated society were much more limited, and, true to his love for his first-born, he wanted to "secure" her through quality education. But choosing such an expensive field of study (a choice largely made by Mohammed, and hesitatingly embraced by Suma) meant that Mohammed was to revert to a life of relative poverty, but this time of his own accord.

10
Intifada: … and All Hell Broke Loose

In his early fifties, my father used two wooden canes to walk; one was an old and locally made cane, which he used for everyday purposes. The other was a hand-carved cane from Egypt, and was only employed on special occasions. For my father, these canes embodied several values. At times, they served as an indication of his prestige as a veteran revolutionary and a community leader, but they also aided him on days where his pains from asthma, high blood pressure, among other ailments, weakened his already frail body. He also had two pairs of glasses, one relatively new, which complimented the quality Egyptian cane, and another old pair with chipped frames and rusty hinges. The old glasses naturally matched the inferior cane.

Zarefah repeatedly urged her husband to abandon his old-fashioned look, but my father, for some reason, held onto his aging tools, arguing that everything had its purpose. Time would prove him right as he completely embraced the appearance of a sage after the onset of the first Intifada. Indeed, if it were not for the old glasses, cane and an ancient robe he had inherited from *his* father, my brothers and I could have possibly suffered great harms, beatings, imprisonment and even death.

In our sitting room also sat a basket overflowing with miscellaneous pairs of spectacles, in an array of styles and many of them taped together and missing lenses. Beside the basket sat a large stack of books, all classics, from Homer to Hugo, Aristotle to Zola, ready for an impromptu read at a moment's notice. My father was one of the most ingenious men I have ever met; when you looked at him, you could see the wheels turning in his brain, spinning to soup up a crazy and cockamamie business deal that only he could pull off, or some new and creative way to keep the ever-present Israeli forces at bay.

My father had a challenging task, for he had five sons all entering or in the midst of their teenage years, and he lived in close proximity to squads of soldiers, who often seemed to torment us for no other reason than boredom or for sheer pleasure. It was customary when they pounded on our door for us all to dart into the sitting room, grab one of Homer or Hugo's beloved volumes, adorn ourselves with one of the many pairs of spectacles in the basket and "pose" as studious intellectuals when the soldiers entered the house.

I particularly remember an episode on a sunny curfew afternoon when we had little time to "set the stage" before the door was kicked in. I grabbed a copy of Maxim Gorky's *Mother* and buried my face in its pages, afraid to look up or make eye-contact with those who broke the door down and announced themselves as "Jews" when they stormed into our home. My father would put on the most amazing performance. He would grab the old cane that leaned

against the wall beside the door for these very incidents, and would limp so convincingly to the living room, where he would explain in his impeccable Hebrew that his sons were not trouble-makers, but scholars. As my father pointed out the fact that we all were enthusiasts of "higher literature," I gazed up from the pages of my book to find that my younger brother Muneer, who sat across the room from me, wore a pair of glasses that had no lenses at all. He was reflectively taking in Hugo's *Les Miserables*, but hadn't noticed that he was holding the book upside down. Although these moments were terrifying, I had to bite down on my tongue to keep myself from bursting into laughter, God knows what might have happened if Muneer or I had blown our cover.

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE INTIFADA STARTED?

It's not easy to isolate specific dates and events that spark popular revolutions. Genuine collective rebellion cannot be rationalized though a coherent line of logic that collapses time and space; it's rather a culmination of experiences that unites the individual to the collective: their conscious and subconscious, their relationships with their immediate surroundings and with that which is not so immediate, all colliding and exploding into a fury that cannot be suppressed.

On December 8, 1987, when thousands took to the streets of the Gaza Strip's largest and poorest refugee camp, Jabaliya, the timing and the location of their uprising was most fitting, most rational, most necessary. And yet it unleashed one of the most chaotic and painful periods in Gaza's history.

I was a first-year student at the Khaled ibn al-Walid High School for Boys when the Intifada started. Being a student at that specific high school was a rite of passage. It was in Khaled ibn al-Walid where Palestinian army volunteers were trained before the war of 1967. The school served as a hub for nationalist gatherings, fiery speeches and occasional visits by high-ranking Egyptian and PLO officials. Some of its teachers became nationally regarded Palestinian leaders. Some of its students became the most celebrated Palestinian activists, prisoners and martyrs.

Khaled ibn al-Walid School required a uniform, comprising a pair of blue jeans and a blue button-down shirt. Several days before the summer break came to a close, my mother took me and my brothers to the local market, where I giddily picked out a new pair of jeans and a shirt. Although my fashion sense was painfully lacking, I joyously embraced my new and reputable role as a pupil in the legendary institution. By then, I was known as "the poet." My nationalist poetry and prose armed my father with ample opportunities to invite intellectuals and various activists to our house for many performances, which my father found exhilarating and I embarrassing to no end. I would be summoned in with my thick notebook to the sitting room, often full of cigarette smoke, laughter and overflowing Arabic coffee. At my father's behest, I would recite to admiring visitors, who would, convincingly or not, inundate my father and me with praise for raising such an erudite son.

But my short-lived happy outlook on life was not felt throughout my home, or among most Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

My grandfather had just passed away. He was an old man. But his demise in a decaying refugee house, not far from ours, was particularly demoralizing, for my grandfather never gave up on the idea that someday he would lead his family back to his distant and now destroyed village of Beit Daras. Israel had long since erased the entire village, but it lived on, in its entirety, in my grandfather's memory, its homes, its earthen pathways, its orchards, people and mosques. Following the Nakba, my grandfather was involved in life in the refugee camp in a nominal capacity that allowed him to survive and care for his family, but his heart was truly left in Beit Daras. On his deathbed, the old man asked to be buried in his orchard on the outskirts of his beloved village. Of course, none of his wishes, to return in life or in death, were ever fulfilled. Instead, he was buried by the tiny grave of my older brother Anwar. Soon after, Zeinab followed her husband, and was also buried in the overcrowded cemetery. Their deaths left my father with much to ponder and regret. For once, he squarely blamed himself for the tumultuous relationship that he had with his parents, his mother in particular.

But my father's woes were not all sentimental. Suma was advancing through medical school with expenses that consumed much of the man's humble resources. Anwar and Thaer graduated from high school and were ready for their next move, both aspiring to study at a West Bank university. My father understood that meeting the new demands for higher education would require more substantial, and risky, business deals in Israel, again.

Then the Intifada started, on one hand articulating and venting Mohammed's own grievances, rejection and disdain of the occupation and the humiliating legacy it espoused, and on the other, making his regular trips to Israel most arduous, and eventually, altogether impossible. Indeed, the Intifada held a strange dichotomy for many: it expressed the outrage of a whole nation, and articulated a sense of collective hope, while inexorably inviting untold harm, both physical and psychological.

WHY REVOLUTION?

The eruption of the Intifada cannot be conclusively explained by one individual, for it meant different things to different people. It was a popular and spontaneous retort to the injustice and the humiliation felt on a daily basis by Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. Although to a lesser degree, it was also an expression of frustration that the Palestinian struggle was becoming a marginal issue on the agendas of Arab governments. As Arab governments were widely entertaining prospects of a settlement with Israel, pressures were mounting on the PLO, now-sidelined in its Tunis headquarters, to revise its political priorities. In Lebanon, the presence of Palestinians looked bleak, as refugee camps were under intense attacks from various militias and by the Israeli air force. One single Israeli raid on Ein al-Hilweh refugee camp, on September 5, 1987, killed as many as 50 refugees.[1]

In the Occupied Territories, the picture appeared equally grim. Israeli Prime Minister Begin resigned in 1983 and was followed by Yitzhak Shamir, a right-wing politician and an ideologue whose ceiling for political compromise didn't reach beyond the possibility of limited Palestinian autonomy. In 1984, an Israeli unity government was established with a most peculiar leadership arrangement, as Shamir of the right-wing Likud Party and Shimon Peres of the Labor Party (who by then had reinvented himself as a "dove") traded the post of prime minister. Yitzhak Rabin was appointed to the post of defense minister.[2] The individuals at the helm of the Israeli leadership constituted the worst possible combination from the point of view of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. While Shamir and Peres served the role of the hardliner and peace-seeker respectively before the international community, both men and their governments presided over a legacy saturated with violence, the illegal annexation of Palestinian land and settlement expansion. While Peres is historically credited for engineering Israel's nuclear program, Shamir was a wanted terrorist during the British mandate period in Palestine, for leading the notorious Stern Gang.[3] Facing no international accountability and confident that Palestinian resistance in the Occupied Territories was duly subdued, the new government continued the policy of land confiscation and heedlessly initiated new settlements and expanded already existing ones. The number of Jewish settlers who moved to the Occupied Territories (excluding the already annexed East Jerusalem) between 1984 and 1988, rose by 80 percent, contributing to a policy of slow-motion annexation of Palestinian land[4] and, predictably, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

Before the Intifada, acts of resistance were present but sporadic. Many of the clashes in the Gaza Strip took place between students and Israeli troops, who used tear gas and mostly rubber bullets to disperse protesters. Many students were affiliated or were supporters of leading PLO factions. Fatah was becoming the most visible faction in Palestinian schools and universities through the rise of the Fatah youth movement, known as "Shabiba." The Islamic movement was divided between the Islamic Compound, which later became Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad, a highly secretive and very daring militant grouping.

The stories of Islamic Jihad fighters always captivated the imaginations of the refugees in Gaza. In May 1987, for example, six Islamic Jihad members escaped an Israeli military prison in Gaza City. The news of their spectacular escape resonated throughout the refugee camps, and hundreds of Israeli troops were dispatched throughout the Strip to apprehend or kill them. My father was visiting with a group of neighbors in front of our house, sipping mint tea and swapping stories, when a masked man came tearing down the street, and not far behind him were several speeding Israeli army jeeps. It was a most alarming scene, and happened at a speed that allowed no one to seek shelter from the hail of bullets which emanated from the Israeli army vehicles. We all watched as the young man found his way into an orchard, pursued by soldiers and gunfire. The refugee camp was placed under a strict military curfew as Israeli helicopters and several army units rushed to "comb" the

orchard. It was understood that the young man was one of the escaped Islamic Jihad fighters. In August of the same year, one of the escapees walked up to an Israeli military jeep that was stuck at a traffic jam in Gaza, and at close range, shot dead the commander of the Israeli army police in the Strip.[5] The name of Islamic Jihad, although a young militant organization, became iconic; news of its activities were whispered among refugees in disbelief and pride, and its dead were immortalized as martyrs.

It is as if Gaza had lost every trace of fear. Gazans became most daring in a time when Israel expected them to be most pacified and subservient. And when they rebelled, as has always been the case, they took everyone by surprise.

THE SOLDIERS ARE COMING!

A Jewish settler was stabbed in a Gaza market on December 6, 1987 by an Islamic Jihad member, retaliating for the Israeli army deportation of several members of the group.[6] Those were the days when settlers walked around Palestinian markets in the Strip, flanked by their weapons, and often accompanied by an entourage of Israeli soldiers, looking for good deals on fresh fish and locally grown vegetables. But that imposed "harmony" was interrupted, when a Palestinian man braved his way through the crowd and stabbed the settler to death.[7] Two days later, an Israeli truck driver drove his large vehicle into the opposite lane of traffic and hit several Palestinian vehicles which were hauling some of Gaza's laborers in Israel, killing four and seriously injuring eight.[8]

The four young laborers killed that day were cousins of my father and descendants of Beit Daras. Israel maintained that the killings were an accident, while Palestinians believed that it was another revenge attack. When the bodies of the four men were lowered into the ground, emotions ran high. The grisly scene was the last straw, and the death of the laborers suddenly represented the grievances of a whole generation.

Hundreds of young men gathered in Jabaliya, near an army camp surrounded with barbed wire, and began hurling stones at the soldiers.[9] The distance between the young men and the soldiers was far enough that the act seemed largely benign and symbolic, but when the Israeli army opened fire, any sense of the symbolic immediately evaporated. Riots engulfed the entire camp, and the sound of Israeli gunfire was heard throughout adjacent areas, as screaming ambulances began hauling Jabaliya's casualties to Gaza City hospitals. On that evening, what had been Gaza's relative calm, only interrupted by an occasional encounter between a Palestinian fighter and Israeli troops, turned into absolute mayhem. The moment long anticipated had finally happened.

By then, a few months into the new school year, my single pair of blue jeans and my shirt looked old and scruffy, despite my incessant attempts at maintaining the looks suitable for a student at Khaled ibn al-Walid. Regardless, my enthusiasm remained strong.

It was Wednesday, December 9, 1987. Following our morning exercise, the school principal ordered us into class, but we, for once, refused to comply.

Flyers distributed by student political groups urged all students to march in protest of the killing of the four laborers and the violence that followed in Jabaliya. I knew that today was no ordinary day, and had already resolved to confront the occupying forces, disobeying my father's clear instructions to come home if I sensed trouble. The teachers tried to force us into class; they even began whipping students' feet with long sticks, almost herding us back to our classrooms. We had no specific plan, but we knew that dutifully sitting at our desks that day was entirely out of the question.

All it took was one daring student to stand up in the center of the schoolyard and start waving a Palestinian flag. The students began chanting, praising the martyrs of Jabaliya: "Rest assured, oh martyrs, for we shall carry on with the struggle," "mothers of our beloved martyrs, do not weep, for we are all your children," and so on. Within a few minutes, the entire school was marching, followed by students from nearby schools, and within an hour, thousands of refugees throughout the Nuseirat refugee camp were moving in one large, unprecedented mass.

Many such protests had taken place in the past in our refugee camp, but the speed at which thousands gathered, the intensity of the chants, the tears of the many women who marched alongside were such that once the protest reached the camp's central market, all vowed that today would not be like any other. Some youths began burning tires, atop a small hill in the center of the camp, signaling for others to join in, but also sending a message of protest to Israeli soldiers at the military encampment, which was stationed strategically between Buraij and Nuseirat refugee camps.

Israeli soldiers quickly poured into the camp, some on foot, others in large military vehicles and small military jeeps. Battle was about to commence. Women, children and elders were urged to leave before the troops arrived. Many young men also retreated. I was terrified and exhilarated. I was no longer a middle-school student, but a student at Khaled ibn al-Walid, and could no longer justify my flight. I picked up a stone, but stood still. Others ran away, but some ran towards the soldiers, with their rocks and flags. The soldiers drew nearer. They looked frightening and foreign. But when the kids ran in the direction of the soldiers and rocks began flying everywhere, I was no longer anxious. I belonged there. I ran into the inferno with my schoolbag in one hand, and a stone in the other. "Allahu Akhbar!", I cried, and I threw my stone. I hit no target, for the rock fell just a short distance ahead of me, but I felt liberated; I was no longer a negligible refugee standing in a long line before an UNRWA feeding center, waiting for a dry falafel sandwich.

Engulfed by my own rebellious feelings, I picked up another stone, and a third. I moved forward, even as bullets flew, even as my friends began falling all around me. I could finally articulate who I was, and for the first time on my own terms. My name was Ramzy, and I was the son of Mohammed, a freedom fighter from Nuseirat, who was driven out of his village of Beit Daras, and the grandson of a peasant who died with a broken heart and was buried beside the grave of my brother, a little boy who died because there was no medicine in the refugee camp's UN clinic. My mother was Zarefah, a refugee

who couldn't spell her name, whose illiteracy was compensated for by a heart overflowing with love for her children and her people, a woman who had the patience of a prophet. I was a free boy; in fact, I was a free man.

As I finally made my way home, with my shirt torn, my knuckles bloodied and my face stained with tears from the tear-gas, I saw my mother, running in a panic, barefoot and still in her pajamas, calling out my name and the names of my brothers. She spotted me and began weeping.

INTIFADA, UPRISING

The Intifada may have been spontaneous, but it certainly required organization, to ensure that the energies of the rebellious communities throughout the Occupied Territories were galvanized toward a specific national objective. As tens of thousands of people poured into the streets of Gaza and the West Bank, grassroots organizations with direct or loose affiliations with PLO factions or the Islamic movement immediately came to the fore, to organize, instruct, direct, and eventually, command and discipline. Within weeks or even days, the Intifada took on two different but related roles. On one hand, it was largely a popular struggle of civil disobedience, mass protests, strikes, refusal to pay taxes and the like. On the other, militant cells of refugee youths were beginning to organize and leave their mark. The second outlet of Intifada expression didn't become apparent until later stages, when the Israeli government of Shamir, with Rabin as a minister of defense carried out what was called the "Iron Fist" policy,[10] which harvested the lives of many Palestinian youths. Scores were killed and wounded in Gaza in the Intifada's first few weeks. Shamir was convinced that the Intifada was the work of the PLO; he calculated that by sending a stern message to the Palestinian leadership, Arafat would have no other option but to order a halt to what Israel perceived as collective Palestinian terrorism. But in fact, the Intifada was not initiated as the result of an executive order of the PLO or any other group, a truth that Israel would learn through years of crackdowns, ranging from Rabin's "broken bones" policy to his "shoot to kill" policy. There was nothing that could have been said at that time to steer the Intifada off course. Nonetheless, Israel tried as vehemently as it could. Meanwhile, both the PLO and the Islamic movement attempted to organize the Intifada, and eventually to co-opt it. But the first year of the Intifada was its most successful as a popular rebellion. In Gaza, initial feelings of despair were transformed into overflowing hope and anticipation. At last, Gazans felt that they were the masters of their own destiny:

> As a news correspondent in those days it was astonishing to see young and old women coming out of the houses to join the men in street protests or supporting them in one way or another. On one occasion, from inside the Shifa hospital in Gaza City, I watched a crowd of young men who were pelting an Israeli army unit with stones. The soldiers were trying to get inside and arrest some of the Palestinians who had been injured in clashes

> earlier in the morning. Girls and women had formed a human chain to keep the shabab at the front line—the faces of the young men masked by kuffiyas—supplied with small rocks and pieces of jagged masonry. As tear-gas fired into the hospital, older women provided raw onion to help ease the stringing pain.[11]

THE WEAPONS

In fact, raw onions became the most popular item in the Nuseirat produce market. In my house, piles of onions occupied center stage in the kitchen, and small baskets of onions were distributed in every room. The open area in front of our house became a primary spot for clashes between armed soldiers and stone-throwing youths. The graveyard was also a popular destination, as young people hid behind the graves to avoid hails of army bullets, before they reappeared to fling their stones and look for more. Indeed, the graveyard was the busiest place in the camp as thousands of mourners accompanied victims of the clashes for burial. Estimates vary on the number of Palestinians killed during the years of the Intifada, which is largely determined as the years between 1987 and 1993, the year when the Oslo Accords was signed between Arafat and Israel. According to UNRWA statistics, 500 people were killed and 50,000 injured in the Gaza Strip during the years of the Intifada.[12] Gaza's Ahli Arab Hospital treated 13,000 cases during the same period. One-third of those treated were children under the age of 15.[13]

Initially, the Israeli army used rubber bullets and tear-gas to quell the mass rebellion, but it quickly changed tactics. On January 17, 1988, Rabin implemented the Iron Fist policy, its "first priority to use might, power and beatings," according to a statement he made to the *Jerusalem Post*.[14] Soon after, live bullets were used in abundance. Plastic-coated metal bullets were also used, giving the impression that the ammunition was harmless, although its wrath was keenly felt throughout Gaza and the rest of the Occupied Territories: "Plastic bullets (small pointed pellets, up to 1.5 centimeters in length) were frequently fired at demonstrators. Despite their size, they could inflict serious injuries (fractures, bleeding or internal wounds) or, in some cases fatal ones."[15]

But even rubber bullets did incalculable damage:

> Rubber bullets used by the Israeli army are heavy metal ball-bearings more than 1.5 centimeters in diameter, covered with rubber. During the Intifada, there were many cases in Gaza of these bullets becoming impacted in human bodies. Some children died when hit on the skull with them, and there were many cases of people damaging (and losing) eyes as a result of being hit in the face by rubber bullets.[16]

As for tear-gas, the story was equally tragic. Tear-gas canisters, like most Israeli weapons used in the Intifada, were financed by the US government and manufactured by American companies. The MK II 560-CS Yard Long

Range Projectiles, manufactured in Pennsylvania,[17] released intense gas with a suffocating odor. Israeli soldiers lobbed tear-gas inside schools, hospitals and people's homes. I kept many empty projectiles in my stash of Intifada memorabilia, along with empty live munitions, plastic and rubber bullets. Collecting the leftovers of Israeli army crackdowns was not a unique habit of mine—many kids in my Nuseirat neighborhood would scour the areas of clashes looking for bullet shells and exhausted gas canisters. Many of the weapons carried the mark of the US, a fact that seemed irrelevant to the children at the time.

As for the youths, their weapons consisted mostly of stones, some thrown by hand, and others through slingshots. Most daring stone throwers protected their identities by masking their faces with *kuffiyas*. Other tactics were also used, such as laying blankets down on roads used by Israeli tanks; the blankets would become entangled in the chains of tanks and cause them to spin endlessly, rendering them completely immobile. Meanwhile, those who perfected the slingshot replaced stones with marbles, which were projected at hovering Israeli army helicopters in hopes of breaking their windows.

THE BOMB SQUADS

One day, during a prolonged Israeli military curfew in our refugee camp, we waited breathlessly as a horde of Israeli soldiers inspected the area in front of our house. Breathing heavily was hazardous under these somewhat exceptional circumstances. The army, my father often advised, was sensitive to the slightest movements or sounds: a whisper, a cough, or God forbid, a sneeze. Thus we sat completely still. Muneer, my younger brother, was entrusted with the mission of peering through the rusty holes in the front door. It bothered me that I was not the one elected for this seemingly perilous mission. My father explained that Muneer was smaller and quicker, he could negotiate his way back and forth, seamlessly, between the observation ground and the room where everyone was hiding.

The house's main door was riddled with holes; the upper half spoke of past battles between the neighborhood's stone throwers and Israeli soldiers. The holes on the lower half however were not those of bullets, but of rust and corrosion. These holes often served us well. Muneer would lie on his belly and peek through them; he followed the soldiers' movements as their military vehicles often used the space in front of our house. They pondered their moves from there, and often used our front step as a spot for lunch or tea. Worse, they often released their frustrations on the house's helpless residents, that being my family. But this time, the air was truly gloomy. Soldiers had never gathered in such numbers and had never remained for that long. Muneer, crawling back and forth, between the door and the kitchen—where we often hid because it was the only room with a concrete ceiling, thus much safer than the rest of the house—reported increasingly disturbing news: "There are men in white." He divulged the latest development with total bewilderment: "They are wearing masks. And there is a robot."

For once, we felt in doubt of Muneer's version of events, which were most often sharp and truthful. Only my father seemed to understand. "Bomb squads," he whispered. His words left us in a state of dread and speechlessness. The sheer terror that we felt at that moment was new to us, for this is something that we had not yet experienced: a bomb only a few feet away from our house, and we couldn't escape, for snipers were positioned all across the street, on the water-tower, behind the graves, everywhere. My mother hurried to her safe corner of reciting Qur'anic verses. She long argued that selected verses from the Qur'an were sure to create a protective shield between one and one's enemies. My father was in no mood to scoff at her or anyone else. He looked as if he were in a trance. I cannot even begin to imagine what must've gone through his head that day. He pulled a cigarette from his pack of Kent King Size cigarettes and seemed past the point of ordinary nervousness. Even if the bomb was diffused, the soldiers would most certainly round up all the youths in the neighborhood, as they had done repeatedly, starting with us, and herd everyone into the military camp's temporary holding facilities. Torture and beating, to glean urgently needed information, were surely to follow. My mother was still in her corner, with audible words here and there breaking the frightening silence, things about God, and "my kids are the only thing I have in this life," and other supplications. My father called on Muneer to join the rest of us, and decided that he himself would take on the mission of watching the developments outside as they unfolded.

My father lay face down for a long time. A military helicopter hovered in place for a little while and then disappeared, perhaps following a moving target, I thought. News was still scarce and my father was still lying on the chipped tiles behind the door. Suddenly, engines of military vehicles outside began charging one after the other. Some began moving away. The noise rapidly subsided. Foot soldiers seemed to be the only ones left behind: one could tell through their continuous murmurs and chatter. The bewilderment intensified, although this time with some hopeful prospects. Are we really meant to survive the unfolding ordeal? My father began making his way back, crawling back to the kitchen. He often crawled that way to show off some of his training in the army many years back. We looked at him with inquiring eyes. My mother abandoned her figurative corner for a few moments, and joined us. "It's our bag of trash," my father said in a tone that was meant to dispel the mystery. "They thought our trash was a bomb." My father had opted to throw our trash in the street just hours earlier. Garbage had accumulated for weeks in our house as the military curfew kept us indoors without a chance to set foot outside. So a few hours earlier, he did what we had urged him to do for days, since we couldn't cope with the suffocating stench. He opened the double doors for a few seconds and threw one black garbage bag as far as he could to the middle of the open space in front of the house. Little did he know that his act of desperado would send the Israeli army on high alert, would invite bomb squads, helicopters and perhaps every available tank and military vehicle to our unsuspecting neighborhood.

Within minutes, the serenity and silence of the military curfew was back—except that watermelon rinds and my father's empty cigarette packs and other items were scattered about the street. "Whose God damn idea was it to throw the trash in the street?" my father mumbled. No one answered. My father puffed on his cigarette and quickly fell into a contemplative mode. "I have never seen such military build-up since the war of '67," he said. His surreal look was interrupted by one hardly audible chuckle, and that was enough to ignite a storm of laughter among my brothers and even my mother, which lasted for a long, long time.

I took my turn peeking through the rust holes to get a piece of the excitement and follow the progress of the trash as it was scattered by the wind and hungry cats in every possible direction. "Hey guys, the chains of the tanks softened the area outside. It should be really good for soccer when the curfew is lifted," I declared jubilantly. And the curfew was indeed lifted, some 40 days later.

In the years of the Intifada, curfews were imposed nightly at 8:00 pm and were lifted the following morning at 5:00 am. This continued for years, and in times of intense fighting, the curfews extended to imprison Gazans within their homes for days, weeks, even months, on end. Schools closed, businesses closed, produce in the markets rotted in the stalls. Hunger was rampant, water scarce and oh, the boredom was often unbearable. With curfews that lasted for months, it wasn't long until families had nothing to eat, and ideas such as boiling the leather soles of shoes to make broth were jokingly entertained. But these dark times had their moments of glory too. It was the "masked men," the "terrorists," that pulled everyone through these awful and dark times. In the middle of the night, families would be awakened to the sound of a large parcel being lobbed through an open window. It happened many times that such gifts from heaven—bags of tomatoes, potatoes, bread and sugar—were thrown into our house through a hole in the asbestos roof or through an open window. Without these valiant young men—who would surely have been killed if discovered with their "contraband"—we might have starved.

But strangely, there are fond memories of the curfews as well. It was never certain how long a curfew might last, perhaps a few days, perhaps a month. We would be informed by army jeeps, that would patrol through the streets and with megaphones announce that everyone that was seen on the streets would be arrested or shot. When the announcement of a curfew began to spread, everyone had their own urgent business to attend to. Mothers dashed to the market to stock up on flour, rice, or vegetables. Fathers ran to buy cigarettes and young men sprinted in a mad dash for the video stores, where there was an abundance of Egyptian and Indian movies. It happened on several occasions that friends could not reach their house in time and would have to stay with us during the curfews. My mother would boils pots of hot mint tea, we would eat warm bread and salty white goat cheese, and we would play cards, watch Indian movies and tell jokes for hours. Time became an irrelevant notion, and the presence and laughter of friends became a lifeline until the curfew was finally lifted.

Poker was also a favorite curfew pastime, and among the many survival supplies my brothers and I ran for at the announcement of curfew was candy, which would be used in abundance for betting in our heated and lengthy poker games.

My younger brother, Muneer was as sensitive as he was competitive. Sometimes, as young boys, the stress of being caged up for days or weeks on end manifested itself in strange and even humorous ways. It was times like this that I look back and especially sympathize with the parents of Gaza, for such times anywhere else would warrant a paddling and a boot outside, so that their kids could run, jump and release their pent-up energy. But such a notion was foreign to Gaza's parents, who recognized such actions as a death sentence for their children.

My brothers and I were in the midst of a tense poker tournament and Muneer was not playing at his best. By the fifth hand, Muneer had lost all of his betting power, hard candy and sticks of gum. To antagonize him even further, we told him that if he wanted to continue, he could buy back some of his candy for collateral, which consisted of one pair of underwear.

Muneer vexingly agreed. He disappeared from the room and reappeared shortly with a pair of underwear which he threw to the crowd of boys, all of whom were desperate for some entertainment and action. Anwar grabbed a broom leaning against the wall, hung Muneer's underwear from the handle and began marching around the room, singing patriotic songs and waving the broomstick like a glorious flag. Immediately we all jumped up in laughter, clapping our hands and singing in unison, marching and jeering at Muneer.

The spectacle quickly became too much for Muneer, and soon he was crying and having a tantrum, chasing after Anwar in an attempt to reclaim his property. Seeing that it was a futile effort, for Anwar was at least a head taller than his twelve-year-old brother, Muneer threw his hands into the air and cried with all the drama and might in his power, "Here we are, soldiers, come and take us all away to your prisons!" Poor thing, like so many times under the stress of curfew, we pushed him to the breaking point that day. But such teasing was a burden shared equally and in equal proportion. Strangely, our mischievous antics within our four walls served as a buffer between the suffocating occupation outside and the boiling-over of anger and revolt among our friends and neighbors.

HAMAS

The Islamic movement, which was already at an advanced stage of organization and readiness, mobilized in response to the Intifada as early as December 9, 1987, the day after the Jabaliya uprising, in a meeting that brought together Islamist leaders in the house of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin.[18] The Islamists issued their first statement endorsing the Intifada on December 14; it was reportedly written by Yassin himself, and signed by the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, meaning "zeal" or "fervor."[19]

The Intifada was the most opportune moment for the Islamic movement to take its development, which had started many years earlier, a step further into political action and mobilization, and eventually branch off to militant activities. The Intifada breathed confidence into all aspects of Palestinian lives, as reflected in the language of Hamas, which still perceived the conflict as pan-Arab and pan-Islamic, as opposed to the PLO's emphasis on being the sole representative of any Palestine-related matter, including the Intifada itself:

> Allah is great, Allah is greater than their army, Allah is greater than their airplanes and their weapons. When you struggle with them [the Israeli army], take into account to request one of two bounties: martyrdom, or victory over them and their defeat … In these days, when the problem is growing more acute and the uprising is escalating, it's our duty to address the word to the Arab rulers, and particularly to the rulers of Egypt, the Egyptian army and the Egyptian people, as follows: What has happened to you, O rulers of Egypt? Were you asleep in the period of the treaty of shame and surrender, the Camp David treaty? Has your national zealousness died and your pride ran out while the Jews daily perpetrate grave and base crimes against the people and the children?[20]

In the Gaza Strip, the new movement Hamas immediately mobilized all of its constituency—its mosques, community and youth centers and large social networks—to echo the call of the Intifada, defining it largely as an Islamic awakening. Hamas extended its influence to reach the West Bank through its student movements in West Bank universities, among other outlets. The violent Israeli crackdown on the Intifada also compelled the rise of a militant branch of the movement, Izz al-Din al-Qassam, which was comprised of several cells, each consisting of two to three fighters, most, if not all, descendants of refugees. The militant wing of the movement was headed by Salah Shehada, a trusted companion of Sheikh Yassin.[21] The activities of the group were highlighted at a later stage of the Intifada, when it had become less popular and more militarized. In its early stages, Hamas militants were largely focused on tracking down and dismantling Israeli spy networks in the Gaza Strip. Collaborators with Israel were warned through mosques and flyers distributed in public places to quit their mistaken ways and seek forgiveness;[22] if they persisted, they were either beaten in public or, in some cases, executed. However, Hamas was not the only movement that sought to direct the Intifada: PLO factions attempted to do this as well.

Meanwhile, my father continued struggling to support his family. His trips to Israel became less frequent as the situation grew more and more tense. He would often bring one of his younger and handsome sons with him, for he longed for the companionship and also hoped that our youthful smiles and bright eyes might work in his favor in some potential business deal. I joined my father on May 20, 1990 on a visit to a factory in Israel to negotiate a business deal with an Israeli Jewish man named Micki, with whom my father had had many dealings throughout the years; he even considered Micki a

friend. We caught a taxi from Rishon le Zion in the late afternoon and drove back into Gaza. Two hours after we arrived home, it was announced on the news that an Israeli reservist, clad in his army uniform, had come to Rishon le Zion, the very same place where my father and I had been, and at gunpoint had taken hostage seven Gazan day laborers. After issuing arduous and humiliating orders, he commanded them to stand single file, and then executed all seven men. Riots ensued and many angry protesters were killed by Israeli forces in the following days, including one of my cousins, a young man named Wael from the Beach refugee camp, who was shot in the neck while standing outside his home.

Eleven days later, breaking news announced that a small group calling itself the Palestine Liberation Front had attempted to storm the Israeli coast on inflatable rafts. Their attack was in response to the extra-judicial killing of the seven Palestinian laborers eleven days earlier. I was 15 years old at the time. The news reported that several boats were lost at sea, for they had traveled from 120 miles off the coast of Tel Aviv. One boat made it to the beach, where there was a ferocious battle between what the Israeli radio called "guerillas" and Israeli military forces. The report said that one lost boat may have found its way to Gaza's beaches. I was overcome with panic and exhilaration. What if these liberators were hiding on our beach right now? Nuseirat was very close to the beach and an urgency to run and find these young men and bring them to the safety of our house was an inescapable fantasy. That night, long after everyone had gone to sleep, I lit a candle, for Gaza was in total darkness when the curfew was imposed at night, and went to the kitchen where I prepared tea with sage and an assortment of biscuits and fruit. As best as I could, I arranged everything on the coffee table and I sat and patiently waited. I imagined what the weary refugees of Gaza would think when they discovered that liberators were in our midst. What a wonderful thought, that our rescue might be at hand. I waited in anticipation and in the dark, listening for any sound or movement that might indicate their arrival. I sat until dawn when the sun began to rise, and I continued until the whole family rose and slowly started their day. My brothers came in where I was sitting and asked what I was doing with the spread before me. When I told them that I was waiting for the liberating fighters, they gave me an inquiring, but not too surprised look, and resumed with their morning. The stray boat was never found and we were all saddened at the prospect of it being lost at sea or attacked by Israeli forces.

For months after that night, my dreams were consumed with such notions of armies from all over the Arab and Muslim world coming to liberate us. Amidst the gunfire and threats of the army outside, I laid quietly beside my sleeping brothers and imagined the many scenarios of rescue. I dreamed of the day I would dash to the beach to behold our saviors coming from Libya, Egypt, or maybe Algeria. The thought that someone, somewhere, thought that Gaza's battered refugees were worth fighting for filled my heart with such optimism and hope for a better future. But somewhere, I cannot exactly remember when, I stopped dreaming of such nonsense.

UNITED NATIONAL COMMAND (UNC)

The Intifada was not only an expression of outrage against the Israeli military occupation, its brutality and colonial designs. It was also a collective articulation of the rejection of the disunity that marred the ranks of the Palestinian leadership, which, following the departure from Lebanon in 1982, was torn between regional and international dismissal, internal corruption and ideological fragmentation. The once-resolute and self-assured PLO became hesitant and unconvincing, and was duly neglected by Arab regimes. Jordan, for one, was actively purging loyalists to Arafat, who was then headquartered in Tunisia, as various Palestinian self-imposed leaders were offering themselves as alternatives to the once larger-than-life figure. Meanwhile, the Jordanian government closed 25 Fatah offices, keeping 12 others open. Those who were not purged were placed under government surveillance.[23]

The Intifada was the answer to the rift in the Palestinian leadership, and within Fatah itself. While Palestinians in the Occupied Territories clashed with Israeli troops, at a price of high casualties and frightening statistics, West Bank and Gaza intellectuals took on the task of articulating the political demands of the Intifada, also at a price of imprisonment and deportation. The United National Command of the Uprising (UNC) was the culmination of the unity that was felt throughout the Occupied Territories, where every segment of society found itself, intentionally or otherwise, playing a role in sustaining the popular uprising. The UNC comprised the PLO's major factions, Fatah, the PFLP, the DFLP and the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP). It was dominated by West Bank intellectuals, but communicated with the rest of the population through the community-based underground Popular Committees, which amongst other tasks circulated UNC's instructions using graffiti as a medium, as well as regularly issued leaflets.[24] Unlike Hamas, UNC's leaflets echoed a purely nationalist line:

> In the wake of our people's glorious uprising, and the need to promote the spirit of struggle and solidarity with our people everywhere, with faithfulness, to the blood of the pure martyrs and our imprisoned brothers, and to express our resistance to the occupation and the policy of repression—expressed in deportations and collective arrests, the imposition of curfew and the demolition of houses—and in order to unite our revolution and our heroic masses, and in obedience to the call of the PLO, our sole legitimate representatives, to continue with the sacrifice and the valiant uprising, we issue the following call ….[25]

The UNC was a decentralized leadership. In its early stages, its presence was less co-opted by the PLO abroad, thus less factionalized, and was reflected mostly through the work of the popular committees. The committees were responsible for many tasks that centered largely on meeting the basic needs of the people, directing the popular actions and communicating the messages of the UNC to the rest of the population. Although the UNC made its allegiance

to the PLO clear from the onset of the Intifada, the Fatah-led PLO abroad found in the UNC and the Intifada as a whole an outlet to reassert its relevance, following years in the political wilderness and in chaos:

> Within a short period, the Fatah-led PLO acquired decisive influence over the UNC's decision-making process … Fatah's first concrete move to assert control over the uprising focused on the incorporation of the UNC under the aegis of the PLO. Fatah's leadership accepted the principle of a unified leadership, apparently due to considerations of normative legitimacy, but worked nonetheless to secure its primacy over the UNC. Ironically, consolidation of Fatah dominance over the UNC was significantly facilitated by the Israeli determination to eliminate members of the local leadership through mass arrests.[26]

The dominance of the Fatah-led PLO sharply contrasted with the UNC's impartial allocation of decision-making powers amongst the PLO factions in the Occupied Territories, and also contributed to the ideological and political clash between Fatah—which sought a political compromise and US engagement through its acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 338—and Hamas, which strongly opposed what it perceived as unwarranted political concessions and a Camp David-style peace process. These disagreements transformed the Intifada in its later stages into a hub for political competition, as both Hamas and the UNC tried to assert their influence through measures that proved taxing, and eventually unbearable, to the people. UNC leaflets announced separate general strikes from those announced by Hamas. In Gaza, it was common for both parties to cancel each other's days of general strike, creating confusion and depressing an already browbeaten population. Nonetheless, the Intifada evolved to engulf all segments of society like never before. Repressive Israeli measures also evolved into collective punishment, extended military curfews, mass detentions, heavy fines, and an assortment of violent policies that affected every Palestinian community, but most of all in the refugee camps. Moreover, the Intifada turned out to be the most costly public opinion battle ever fought by Israel. Thousands of daily images of wounded youths, and of others barefoot and armed with sling shots battling heavily armed soldiers, were published and beamed through to the international media. In the US, in the early months of 1988,[27] major television network CBS's footage of Israeli soldiers breaking the arms and legs of several handcuffed and blindfolded Palestinians marked an era that was painfully carved in Palestinian memory as the era of the "broken bones" policy.

WHICH HAND DO YOU WRITE WITH?

Schools in our refugee camp were closed for extended periods, as were schools throughout the Gaza Strip. On one such typical school-free morning, my brothers and I were sleeping late. My mother was ready to watch an early morning re-run of "MacGyver," an American show that was aired on

Jordanian television. Sometimes she asked me to read the subtitles, but on that morning, she was content to watch MacGyver without my commentary, as he turned negligible everyday items into impressive devices that bewildered his adversaries. My father was tuning in the channel as my mother went to prepare the morning tea.

Unexpectedly, I was awakened by a large boot pressing against my face. My older brothers were particularly bothersome, but stepping on my face while sleeping was even too cruel for them. I woke up to find a swarm of soldiers inside the house and standing over me. They had pushed open the main door, walked in quietly, and found their way into the main bedroom where my brothers and I were sleeping. Anwar was a heavy sleeper, and only woke up after two soldiers began violently kicking him and his mattress.

My mother came running from the kitchen, thinking the chaos was the result of a morning scuffle between her five sons, only to find an Israeli army unit handcuffing her children and dragging them out into the street. The event was customary. Soldiers often stormed into people's homes and broke the arms and legs of men and boys so as to send a stern message to the rest of the neighborhood that they would receive the same fate if they continued with their Intifada.

My father spoke good Hebrew, which he learned during his years of business dealings in Israel. My mother spoke none, but even if she did, she would not have been able to articulate one legible sentence. After a brief pause, she let out a howl, and cried out to one of them, "I beg you soldier. My sons were sleeping. They have done nothing wrong. I kiss your hand, don't break their arms. I beg you, may Allah return you safe and sound to your family. How would your mother feel if someone came to break her children's arms? Oh Allah, come to my rescue. My children are the only thing I have in this life. Oh Allah I was raised poor and orphaned, and I don't deserve this."

At first, the soldiers paid no heed to my mother's pleas, and merely responded "Shut up and go inside," but her crying alerted the women in the neighborhood, who served as a first line of defense under such circumstances. Neighborhood women gathered outside their homes, screaming and shouting, as soldiers lined us up against the wall and brought in their clubs. The custom was for the soldier to ask the person singled out for a beating, "Which hand do you write with?" before breaking it with the club, followed by the other arm, and then the legs.

When the soldier asked one of my brothers the same ominous question, my mother's pleas turned into unintelligible cries as she dropped to the floor and held onto one of the soldier's legs with a death grip. The soldier tried to free himself, as two others came to his rescue, pounding the frail woman over and over again in the chest with the butts of their machine guns, as my father forced his body between the angry solider and the desperate mother.

Made more courageous by the violent scene, especially as my mother seemed to be drowning in the gush of blood flowing from her mouth, neighborhood women drew closer, throwing rocks and sand at the soldiers. What was meant as an orderly beating of several boys turned into a chaotic scene where women

braved guns and tear-gas and verbal abuse by Israeli soldiers, who eventually retreated into their military vehicles and left the area.

Thanks to my mother, our bones were left intact that day, but at a price. She was left bruised and bleeding. Her chest was battered and several ribs were broken. She was rushed to a local hospital and was incapacitated for days. Her health deteriorated, to the bewilderment of the Ahli Hospital doctors, who had hoped for an eventual recovery. Days later, doctors discovered that my mother had multiple myeloma. Apparently she had been sick for some time, but her illness was exacerbated by the violent encounter, which made her prognosis bleak.

With this, she announced to the family that she wished to die at home, for there was nothing that under-equipped local hospitals could do to help. My father would not even entertain such a notion. But how do you treat a cancer patient, with broken ribs, without health insurance, with little money and in an area that is paralyzed by strikes, curfews and daily violence?

ODYSSEY

My father used what remained of the family savings to treat my mother's aggressive illness. He hired a taxi to take them to clinics and hospitals and pharmacies. On days when general strikes were announced, they had to walk, at times for hours. They were frequently absent, and when they returned, they were exhausted. My mother would throw herself on her bed, and my father would sit for prolonged periods dividing his time between coughing and crying.

But my mother grew even weaker, and as time passed she was unable to move without suffering severe pain. My parents resolved that they could no longer leave us alone in our neighborhood, which had become a very dangerous area; thus, we were dispatched to "safer" places: the home of relatives, friends and, at one point, a little shack in the middle of an orchard, with no running water, no electricity and the constant fear of being discovered and maybe killed by Israeli soldiers.

My two older brothers were sent to stay at a friend's house, near Gaza City, while I and my two younger brothers were left in the hut in the Gaza orchard. My mother was hospitalized in Gaza City, and my father divided his time between us and her. Whenever he arrived, carrying bags of bread, apples, bananas and water, we ran to greet him. His news was increasingly grim. "Your mother's fate is in God's hands," was his oft-repeated medical assessment. Finally, he decided to take her to Egypt to be treated at the Palestine Hospital in Cairo. Zarefah resisted. She told him that she would rather die in her house in the refugee camp, but he maintained that there was still hope and that he would not give up until his last breath. They went to Egypt, along with my younger brothers. My older brothers and I were relocated to a small room atop the roof of a building in Deir al-Balah. We had no telephone, and soon ran out of money. Two months later, my parents returned.

THE CAR DOWNSTAIRS

I was awakened by a friend who told me in a somber voice that my parents were home. He wanted to elaborate, but I gave him no chance, throwing the cover to the side and running to wave to them from the roof. My father was being embraced by neighbors, as he stood by a truck with an open flat-bed. Inside the truck was a coffin draped with a Palestinian flag. It was my mother. My father soon came upstairs. He hugged us and we all cried. He gave me a small plastic bag, filled with knick-knacks that my mother had bought me in Egypt. "She sent you her love and many kisses," my father said. I hid her gifts under my mattress, and joined the rest to the refugee camp to bury her.

Nuseirat was under a curfew, and the Israeli army agreed to allow her burial on the condition that only the immediate family was to be present, under the monitoring of Israeli soldiers. We arrived at the graveyard, carrying the coffin and were soon joined by Mariam, Zarefah's mother, who came running into the graveyard calling out her daughter's name. We began digging, but neighbors peeking through their windows quickly concluded that Zarefah had died and was being buried. My mother was a beloved neighbor. She was particularly adored among the older women of the camp, whom Zarefah treated with untold kindness. "Allahu Akbar," resonated a voice, coming from one of the refugee homes. "Um Anwar has died," cried another. Within minutes, shouts of "God is Great" echoed throughout the camp. People appeared from everywhere, carrying Palestinian flags; women, children, old men and women, and youth, all descended onto the graveyard. Refugees were outraged that the poor woman was to be buried subject to military restrictions, and was to be followed, even to her grave, under the watchful eyes of the occupiers, their guns, tanks and a hovering army helicopter. Youth began throwing stones, and soldiers responded with bullets and tear-gas. But the people were not to disperse easily this time. Thousands of them ensured that Zarefah would depart the earth and enter Paradise in the company of friends, treated as a martyr should be treated. As an ambulance hauled some of the wounded to the local clinic, Zarefah was lowered into the ground amidst chants and Qur'anic verses, recited by everyone. Shouts of "Allahu Akbar" were intermingled with the whimpers and prayers of the crowd, the sound of bombs, the tear-gas, and the hovering helicopter. My mother was 42 years old when she died.

THE INTIFADA EFFECT

Zarefah's burial represented everything pure about the Intifada: the unity of purpose, the courage, the sheer rage and resentment of the occupation, the sense of community, the resolve and the determination of the refugees. But the Intifada's uncomplicated, yet poignant message was to be co-opted and corrupted by those who wished to use its achievements for personal and factional gains.

The Intifada renewed regional and international focus on the PLO, which took several initiatives to reassert its relevance to the Intifada and the Palestinian struggle in general. On November 12, 1988, the PNC convened in Algiers to approve a political strategy based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, the habitual US condition for engaging with the PLO. At the end of deliberation, and based on that approval, Arafat announced the independent Palestinian state, to be established in the Occupied Territories, with East Jerusalem as its capital:

> [The concluding statement affirmed] the determination of the PLO to arrive at a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and its core, which is the question of Palestine within the frameworks of the UN Charter, the principles [and] provisions of international legality, the norms of international law, the resolutions of the UN … and the resolutions of the Arab summit, in such a manner that safeguards the Palestinian Arab people's right to return, to self-determination, and the establishment of their independent national state on their national soil, and that institutes arrangements for the security and peace of all states in the region [through a negotiated settlement at an international peace conference on the basis of UN resolutions 242 and 338 and Palestinian national rights].[28]

The US still argued that the PNC statement did not qualify for an "unconditional" acceptance of Resolution 242, hence pressing Arafat for more concessions.[29] Arafat flew to Geneva and addressed the UN General Assembly on December 13, 1988, since the US refused to grant him an entry visa to speak at the UN headquarters in New York. He labored to be even more specific:

> The PLO will work to reach a comprehensive peaceful settlement between the parties involved in the Arab-Israeli struggle, including the state of Palestine and Israel, as well as the other neighboring states, within the framework of an international conference for peace in the Middle East in order to realize equality and a balance of interests, particularly the right of our people to freedom and national independence, and the respect of the right to life and the right of peace and security for everyone, namely, all the parties involved in the struggle in the area, in accordance with Resolutions 242 and 338.[30]

However, the US maintained its position, compelling Arafat, on the next day, to once again reiterate the same previous statements, this time explicitly renouncing "all forms of terrorism, including individual, group or state terrorism."[31]

Israel, on the other hand, defined the Intifada as an act of terror, which had been launched, organized and manipulated by the PLO to extract political concessions from Israel. Arafat's initiatives in Geneva finally won the approval of the US, who agreed to hold low-level meetings between American

officials and a PLO delegation in Tunisia. Israel was displeased with Arafat's political maneuvering, and particularly annoyed by the fact that 117 UN member states rushed to announce their recognition of the newly declared State of Palestine. The advent of President George Bush's administration, in January 1989, witnessed intense American efforts aimed at reaching a peace deal that catered to Israel's sensibilities, but also took advantage of the unilateral concessions made by Arafat. Israel insisted that it had no interest in recognizing or negotiating with the PLO, while US Secretary of State James Baker, along with Egypt, pressed Arafat to allow for an Occupied Territories-based delegation to hold a dialogue with Israel.[32] In May 1989, Shamir's government produced its own elaborate plan, seen largely as an attempt to avert American pressure for failing to reciprocate the PLO's overtures. Shamir's plan called for efforts to solve the "humanitarian problem of Arab refugees," as well as the election of local Palestinian representatives, and American pressure on Arab states to normalize with Israel.[33] The elected Palestinians were meant to negotiate a five-year transition, which would lead to limited autonomy.[34] Obviously, Palestinians rejected the plan, and the US didn't "pressure" Israel much further.

Meanwhile, our subjugation continued: my neighbors still spent much of their days queuing up in charity lines where my mother once stood, lines for flour, rice, milk, or maybe used clothes from some European country. They must have pondered many things as they waited for so many hours in those lines. Perhaps they thought it strange that the same insignia from the United States imprinted on the 2-liter can of cooking oil, or the 25-kilo bag of flour that was rationed to each family each month, was the same insignia on the random tear-gas grenade canisters littering the streets of Gaza. Such were the ironies that we pondered, as Shamir and his like deliberated the "humanitarian problem of the Arab refugees." I often pondered the afterlife, and hoped that my mother could sense the gratitude I felt in retrospect for the boredom and embarrassment she endured for so many years in those lines in her children's stead.

The Intifada continued to reinforce the position of the PLO, at least among the Arabs. In May 1990, the cause of Palestine, support for the Intifada, and resisting the massive immigration of Jewish settlers from the Soviet Union to Israel were the main highlights of the Arab summit in Baghdad.[35] The summit reintroduced the Palestinian struggle as a top Arab priority, and Arafat as a national hero. However, when Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, the PLO and Arafat found themselves in a most precarious position. On one hand, Iraq had become the strongest supporter of the PLO, providing financial help and scholarships to numerous Palestinian students, but more importantly, it single-handedly provided the PLO with political validation among Arabs after many years of neglect. On the other hand, most Arab regimes sided with the US, and some joined its war coalition that aimed at forcing an Iraqi exit from oil-rich Kuwait. While Arafat and the PLO didn't recognize the legitimacy of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, they supported Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's position that the crisis should be

solved regionally, and also supported his link between the Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories with his withdrawal from Kuwait. Arab Gulf countries began a series of punitive measures against the PLO and the tens of thousands of Palestinian workers in the Gulf. In late August 1990, scores of PLO operatives were deported from Saudi Arabia, and many thousands of Palestinian workers were fired and deported from several Gulf countries. Many Palestinians lost their lives in Kuwait, following the US-led liberation of the country, in widespread acts of revenge. By the end of the war and the defeat of Iraq, the PLO had lost much of its political legitimacy, both regionally and internationally, and most of its funding. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories suffered on many fronts. An already weakened local economy was all but completely destroyed by the Israeli closures and long curfews that accompanied the war, and also by the loss of the remunerations that were sent regularly by Palestinians in the Gulf to their relatives in occupied Palestine. Yet, somehow, despite the marginalization and the demoralization felt by most Palestinians during that period, the Intifada continued unabated.

Israel continued with its oppressive measures. Aside from its collective repression, it worked to eliminate individuals who were seen as the dynamos that propelled the Intifada. In April 16, 1988, Abu Jihad, a top Fatah leader and visionary behind the inception of the movement, was assassinated by Israeli commandos in Tunis. The Israeli assassins belonged to the Sayeret Metkal units.[36] The assassination reflected the Israeli government's belief that the Intifada was organized through a PLO order, specifically by Abu Jihad himself. His, however, was the first of several targeted killings that eliminated top Fatah leaders who were seen as obstacles to the future peace process. The death of Abu Jihad however, was met with greater resolve by Palestinians and the UNC to widen the revolt.

On May 18, 1989, the quadriplegic spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheikh Yassin, was arrested in Gaza, and tried in a well-publicized trial that lasted for a year and aired on Israeli television.[37]

> [Most of] the detainees who were convicted asked—as their final wish—for forgiveness and mercy and showed remorse for what they had done. Sheikh Yassin and a few others refused to express any form of apology in front of the court. Though this might have been good for his standing in Gaza, it resulted in a severe verdict: The court dictated a lifetime sentence.[38]

As Israel expanded its crackdowns, the US, following the Gulf War, tried to translate its victory in Kuwait to political gains by announcing the arrival of a "new world order." The PLO, isolated and almost completely bankrupt, seemed to be heading for political capitulation, which raised the ire of both Hamas and the PFLP, leading to strife in the ranks of the Intifada leadership itself.[39] James Baker resumed his Middle East diplomacy, this time under the impetus of the new world order, which simply articulated the US's vision of the region's future. The PNC met again in Algiers, in September 1991. It agreed, amid loud rejection of the left-wing Fronts, to authorize the

participation of representatives from the Occupied Territories at the upcoming regional peace conference, sponsored by the US and, less significantly, by the Soviets.[40] Palestinian delegates were resolved to participate—in accordance with an American request, itself pandering to Israeli expectations—in a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation. Subsequently, an international conference for peace in the Middle East convened in Madrid in October 1991. The bilateral talks commenced afterwards, and soon, in Palestinian and Israeli delegations (within the framework of Israeli-Jordanian/Palestinian rounds of negotiations) were held in Washington.

OUR MAN IN MADRID

Palestinians in the Occupied Territories perceived the conference as a victory for the Intifada. The Palestinian members of the joint delegation were comprised largely of well-respected Palestinian nationalists, led by veteran Gaza leader Haidar Abd al-Shafi. In Gaza, we anticipated the speech of the aging Palestinian doctor, as he took to the podium. Desperate, angry and hurt, we wanted him to verbalize the pain of three generations as we gazed at the television screens:

> We, the people of Palestine, stand before you in the fullness of our pain, our pride, and our anticipation, for we have long harbored a yearning for peace and a dream of justice and freedom. For too long the Palestinian people have gone unheeded, silenced, and … our rightful struggle against injustice maligned, and our present existence subsumed by the past tragedy of another people. It is time for us to narrate our own story, to stand witness as advocates of a truth which has been long laid buried in the consciousness and conscience of the world. We do not stand before you as supplicants, but rather as the torch bearers who know that in our world of today, ignorance can never be an excuse. We seek neither an admission of guilt after the fact, nor vengeance for past iniquities, but rather an act of will that would make a just peace a reality. We speak out, ladies and gentlemen, from the full conviction of the rightness of our cause, the verity of our history, and the depth of our commitment. Therein lies the strength of the Palestinian people today, for we have scaled the walls of fear and reticence and we wish to speak out with the courage and integrity that our narrative and history deserve.[41]

Although skeptical of the new world order that gave birth to the Madrid conference, and aware of the rejection of the Palestinian left and Islamic movements of the political concessions that were made prior to the international meet, still Gaza hung onto Abd al-Shafi's every word. Gazans were desperate for hope and wanted to defy conventional wisdom to believe that good things would come from Madrid. For a few fleeting moments we looked on, oblivious to the roaring of the tanks outside, the screams of pain, the sound of bullets, to the jeering soldiers, hoping that peace—true peace, peace with dignity,

justice and human rights—would eventually reach our ghetto, our torn and bloodied lives, our homes, our schools and our markets. For a moment, we wanted to believe, but time proved us wrong. The banter carried on, as did the Israeli bulldozers, demolishing homes, building settlements, and destroying olive and citrus orchards. The talk continued, as did the casualty count, the closures, the mass arrests. The Intifada was getting weaker and the local delegates, lacking any tools to pressure Israel, politically or otherwise, were unable to press Israel to change its stance regarding Palestinian independence, sovereignty, the rights of refugees, the status of Jerusalem and all other issues. Meanwhile, Israel was frantically trying to quell the Intifada, and the Fatah-led PLO was distraught, attempting to regain center stage, as a West Bank-Gaza leadership had become the focus of world attention.

"VICTORY"

The Intifada eventually died out. Sheer exhaustion, caused by successive waves of economic burdens—the unemployment of tens of thousands of Palestinian laborers in Israel, prolonged closures that suffocated the local economy, then the Gulf War—was the fundamental reason behind the demise of the Intifada. But there is more to the end of the Intifada than economic burdens and even Israeli repression:

> The petering out of the uprising can be explained by the effects of the repression, which decapitated the movement by imprisoning or banishing its leaders. Bereft of its battle-hardened political leaders, the Intifada was taken over by younger and younger militants with progressively less experience. The men resorted all too easily to violence, including violence directed against Palestinian society itself. There were clashes between rival groups, with particularly savage competition between Fatah and Hamas activists … In some places, however, the activists appeared to be more interested in consolidating their local power than fighting the Israelis … Probably it was to the advantage of the Palestinian leaders abroad to maintain a certain level of disorder in the West Bank and Gaza, with a view to weakening the emergent alternative power structure that had taken root in the Occupied Territories.[42]

Factional rivalries, the lack of alternatives to the economic woes of the people, and the chaotic violence carried out regularly against anyone suspected of collaboration with Israel, demoralized Palestinians. There was a pervasive, although concealed, sense of readiness to abandon the battle, even if temporarily. Gaza had been hit the hardest. It had no alternative industry, little agricultural land, and no open borders to the outside world. It was tightly sealed to the point of suffocation, even starvation. There was a need for any political "breakthrough," any "achievement" that would allow Gazans to catch their collective breath to mend their broken lives, to live another day. The "breakthrough" happened in late 1993, in the form of an initially secret

peace accord, signed between Arafat and the Israelis. Gazans knew well that the agreement would not meet their most basic rights. They cheered for it, nonetheless. They cheered for Arafat, even before they knew what the agreement had in fact stipulated, or failed to stipulate. Gaza was browbeaten and bloodied. Oslo was the best-timed disaster that had ever befallen Gaza and the rest of the Occupied Territories.

As local Palestinian leaders negotiated with their Israeli counterparts an agreement based on UN Resolutions 242, 338 and other resolutions, as mandated by the PNC, Arafat and a few Fatah officials negotiated a secret agreement in Oslo, Norway, which concluded on August 20, 1993. The Declaration of Principles (DoP) for Interim Palestinian Self-Governance Arrangements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was approved by the Israeli cabinet, then under the premiership of Rabin on August 30.[43] On September 13, in Washington, the top PLO echelon celebrated what it considered a historic victory, as the PLO and Israel traded official recognitions. The DoP was officially declared. There was no need for the Intifada anymore, but large segments of Palestinian society were not convinced.

My father had by then lost all of his savings and incurred large amounts of debt caused by my mother's illness and the fact that he had no work outlet to bring in any income. Over time, he grew severely depressed. His health deteriorated. He had many regrets and many sleepless nights. Our family emerged from hiding in Deir al-Balah, and returned to our house in Nuseirat. The house, neglected for years, was in a dilapidated state. There was no money to fix its bullet-scarred walls or battered roof. Thousands of refugees rushed to the main road in celebration when they learned that Arafat was to return to Gaza. My father, known for his biting political commentary, said nothing. He just walked into his room, sat for hours, contemplating and at times talking to himself. He knew it was all a charade, but said nothing; he just sat and stared at a framed picture of his lovely wife, sipped black tea and smoked, for what seemed like an eternity.

11
Oslo on the Line

In July 1994, I left Gaza. Since then, and for many years since, my father came to me repeatedly as a deep, warm, yet cheerless voice at the other end of a telephone line. "How are you, my son? How are your children? Have you heard what happened to us?" Then, he would begin, with a most distressing narration of events in Gaza, and his own refugee camp. His oft-repeated wish was to see his grandchildren, "even if once" before he died. During those years, he was confined to Gaza under constant closure and repeated siege.

My father's congratulatory words were mixed with whimpers the day my firstborn daughter, Zarefah was born in Seattle. We named her after my mother, naturally. "I feel as if your mother came back to life today," he told me with a trembling voice. My telephone conversations with my father were a major source of sorrow. He called me very often to seek comfort, and I called him just as often to offer support. But, at times, it seemed as if there was nothing that I could have said or done to make the slightest difference in his life. He was living alone, away from his children in a refugee camp in Gaza, a few feet away from his wife's grave, subsisting on the occasional telephone calls from my brothers Anwar, Muneer, Thaer and Mustafa, my sister Suma and myself. Whenever I called, he answered almost instantly, as if he had spent every moment, night or day, beside the telephone, as if he tucked it beside him as he slept. But I seldom sensed that I was speaking with the same man of past years, who was vigorous, funny, resourceful and, somehow, still optimistic. With the passing of time, the qualities that made him the unique and inspiring person that he was were changing. He was growing depressed, cynical and worried about the future. Throughout these years, I never saw any photos of my father. Therefore, among the many images that I instinctively summoned into memory when I thought of him, was the way he looked on the day I left the camp in 1994.

I still vividly remember his face—wrinkled, apprehensive, warm—as he last wished me farewell. He stood outside the rusty door of our home in the refugee camp wearing faded yellow pajamas and a seemingly ancient robe. As I hauled my one small suitcase into a taxi that would take me to Tel Aviv airport an hour away, my father stood still. I wished he would go back inside; it was cold out and the soldiers could pop up at any moment. As my car moved on, I couldn't bear to look back, so I gazed at him in the rear-view mirror, as he faded in the distance, along with the graveyard, the water tower and the camp. It never occurred to me that I would never see him again.

That image was frozen in my mind for so many years. Whenever we spoke on the phone, it was his face then and there that came to mind. We spoke

often and at length. He lamented, complained, yelled, wept, and only laughed when I shared news of my children's latest mischief.

Few things in life are as painful as standing helpless before the pain of a loved one. I lived that moment almost every time we talked. When Israel bombed the electric generators of the Gaza Strip, stationed only a short distance from my father's house in Nuseirat,[1] he called me in a panic. He could no longer operate the oxygen pump on which he relied to breathe. He gasped on the phone as he relayed the horror of the bombing, life without electricity, water, and without oxygen. He also called me when Israeli Apache helicopters bombarded his neighborhood. "Can you hear the helicopter? Can you hear it? Here it comes," he said with a sense of dread in his voice, and then an explosion would follow. I paused, not knowing whether he would return to the telephone again. He would re-emerge, describe the horror of the moment, once more, before another missile whizzed by, then another explosion, then silence, then, him again, calling out to me in a panic. I could do nothing. "Just pray, Dad," I would intervene, to claim a sense of control in a most chaotic moment, one which was repeated too often.

GAZA'S NEW RULERS

I remember one of our earliest telephone conversations, only a few months after I left Gaza. I was still unsure whether my departure was a wise decision. Before I embarked on my journey to the United States, my options were made even more limited: I had been living in the West Bank for over a year, pursuing a degree at Birzeit University, but was forced by the Israeli military to return to Gaza. By then, I was married to an American activist, and we had resolved to live in Gaza upon finishing my studies at Birzeit, a plan that never actualized. Gazan students in the West Bank were doubly cursed, by the Strip's inadequate educational opportunities, and the hardship of obtaining an Israeli permit to cross from the Strip to the West Bank's more reputable universities. I was one of those unfortunate students. I had a permit that required renewal every few weeks, which required an unpleasant visit to the Israeli military governor's headquarters near Ramallah. But my anti-occupation activism at Birzeit hurt my chances, however dim, of extending my expired permit. An uptight-looking Israeli officer gave me one out of two clear options: deportation to Gaza, or imprisonment in the West Bank. Of course, I opted for Gaza. My crime was writing poetry that was critical of the Oslo Accords. That made me, as my father was once classified before me, an agitator. I packed my bags and returned to Gaza. My decision to travel to the United States, which came a few months later, was hardly a simple one, for by then my father was living alone. The rest of my brothers and my sister, Suma—who had finished her studies in Syria and returned to Gaza to work as a doctor—led their own lives, and were separated from my father and each other by innumerable checkpoints. But my father insisted that by me leaving Gaza, he would be better off. His logic was uncomplicated. My safety, he argued, would make him sleep better at night. Knowing that I am alive and well, even if thousands of miles away,

he contended, would reduce his stress, and the hope of seeing me, and my brothers once more, "when the situation is normal again," would give him a reason to live. Alas, the situation was never to be "normal."

He maintained the same argument, when I called him, a few months after my arrival in Seattle, where I studied and lived with my wife. But I wanted to return to Gaza. Something continued to pull me back to that place. But my father discouraged me from doing so. "The Gaza you remember is no more," he said. "Gaza is now ruled by the corrupt. Believe me, son, those who collaborated with Israel during the Intifada lead normal lives, and those who resisted and lost everything are fought at every corner, thrown in jail and tortured; not by Israel, but by the Palestinians themselves."

Oslo didn't simply break Gaza's rebellion; it also broke its spirit and my father's as well. The Oslo Accords—all the agreements, memorandums, understandings, and all sorts of papers that were signed before an international media fanfare, and amid talks of hope, prosperity and "painful," but necessary compromises—were of no relation to the original principles which Gazans, like most Palestinians, had embraced for generations. There was no real freedom to celebrate, but mere slogans and symbols, which evidently became void of any meaningful representation. The Palestinian flag, for example, became a symbol of interim agreements signed between Arafat and the Israelis, thus, for many Palestinians, a meaningless banner. It now stood for very little, as there was no redress of injustices, no accountability, and no true end to the occupation. Israeli soldiers didn't truly evacuate from the Gaza Strip, they merely redeployed their forces to more strategic and less populated areas. That, however, should not suggest in any way that things in Gaza remained exactly the same. In some way, Gaza's desolation was intact: the collective incarceration and oppression and the extreme poverty, all remained unchanged. However, the sources of Gaza's misery were no longer generated by Israel alone.

EXIT THE PLO

My father was particularly distraught by the fact that his generation—those who had fought for Gaza, fended for their families and resisted the occupation for many years—were discarded in the post-Oslo period. In fact, the PLO itself was made, more or less, obsolete. In 1994, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was formally established, in accordance with the Oslo Accords.[2] The PA slowly but deliberately stripped the PLO from its historic mission. One can safely conclude that the PA was founded at the expense of the PLO, which was once seen as an organization that represented Palestinians everywhere. The PLO's influence on Palestinian society, regional relevance and international import dissipated over time, to the point that it became an institution that simply represented its members or at best, one specific faction, Fatah, and one specific sub-faction within Fatah, the self-seeking few. The PLO would resurface once in a while to serve as a rubber stamp for the PA's policies. The transfer of powers was predictable, however. Oslo demanded a new political

arrangement that expected a non-democratic body to represent Palestinians. Thus, the PLO was marginalized, almost entirely. Not just my father and most Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, but Palestinians in Diaspora, especially those lingering in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and elsewhere, felt disowned. The PA did not in any way represent Palestinians in Diaspora, and the PLO was no longer a significant body that mattered in any truly meaningful way. However, the PLO continued to exist in the minds of some as a symbol of the unifying and revolutionary platform that expressed a nation's political aspirations. For others, it was a useful tool summoned to endorse the PA's political agenda whenever needed.

Unlike the relatively democratic character of the PLO, the PA was an exclusivist political apparatus, a sophisticated political club, even, which catered to the interests of the few, reinvented elitism in Palestinian society, and seemed at times more interested in meeting Israeli demands than living up to the modest expectations of the Palestinians themselves:

> The new reality involved the creation of a Palestinian Authority with some jurisdiction over the two-and-a-half million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. It also included the establishment of an elected Palestinian Council with the executive and legislative authority constrained by the agreements. A host of new questions … were posed to Palestinians, such as the relation of the Palestinian Authority to the PLO and of the Palestinian Council to the Palestinian National Council, which is part of the PLO structure. But the more important questions revolve around the nature of the new Palestinian political system … its relation to Palestinian society and to the people that live under it, the new role of Palestinian political parties and other organized groups in society, and the ability of the new system to salvage national rights from the throes of an agreement made in an atmosphere of resignation.[3]

HOLLOW SYMBOLS

Such an "atmosphere of resignation," however, was met with a most enthusiastic reception from the international community, or at least from those who claimed leadership over the oddly defined "international community." "Peace at last," was the celebrated notion around the world, a conception that very few Palestinians in the Occupied Territories could truly appreciate. Even before Palestinians were to taste the first fruits of the promised peace, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on October 14, 1994.[4] My father was most cynical when the three were celebrated as "peacemakers." Like most refugees, his life was hardly affected in any positive way by Oslo. A visit to his sons in the West Bank required countless applications, various colored Israeli permits (a process now facilitated by the PA), hours and days of queuing for the various permits, and a waiting period of possibly months. Even then, the outcome was never

guaranteed. If Oslo failed to secure a seemingly simple wish, how could it possibly lead to securing the national demands of the Palestinian people, reclaim Jerusalem, bring back the refugees and secure decades-long denied rights? It took my father no time to recognize the charade. He had been a refugee long enough not to be fooled by television footage of politicians' disingenuous smiles and handshakes.

When the last Israeli troops evacuated their military headquarters in the center of Gaza City, on May 18, 1994, at about 2.00 am[5] Gaza's sense of relief was unparalleled. Little did most Gazans know that the Israeli troops were merely repositioned somewhere else inside the Strip. Perhaps it was on that very same day that Gaza's mistrust of Oslo truly commenced. Oslo's story had indeed begun as that of broken promises, crushed hopes—which often followed heightened expectations—and precarious deadlines:

> The euphoria did not last long. The realization dawned on the inhabitants of Gaza that while the Palestinian National Authority was being established and the Palestinian police had taken the place of Israeli troops on the streets and towns, some aspects of life had not changed. Most important of all, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from population centers had simply been part of redeployment of forces within the Strip. That meant while the world was blandly talking about withdrawal of the Israeli army from Gaza, up to 5,000 soldiers were still deployed in the Strip, with another 10,000 engaged in the overall security of the area. The citizens of Gaza, in other words, still had to pass Israeli military checkpoints on Gaza territory and pass beneath Israeli gun positions.[6]

BUILDING FRENZY

For the Israeli government, Oslo was hardly a distraction from its active illegal settlement programs in the Occupied Territories. On the contrary, while Palestinians were struggling to define their relationship to the new era and its unfamiliar institutions, Israeli leaders redoubled their efforts aimed at the "natural expansion" of Jewish settlements:

> The DOP (Declaration of Principles) incorporates the US version of the peace process in all essential respects. One cannot really accuse Israel of violating the Oslo agreements, except in details. Without violating the wording of the DOP (or the carefully constructed subsequent resolutions), Israel continued to settle and integrate the Occupied Territories with US support and assistance. Intentions were not concealed. They were announced openly by Rabin and Peres and implemented by them and their successors.[7]

Under Oslo, the settlements grew at a much higher rate than before. Some Israeli estimates indicate that the settler population in the West Bank doubled between September 1993 and 2000, ballooning to over 210,000.[8] That number doesn't include the nearly 200,000 settlers in illegally occupied and annexed

Arab East Jerusalem. In fact, the "peace years" sparked a frenzy in Israel to expand existing settlements and construct new and strategically positioned ones, culminating in 2000 to a most intense construction campaign. Building in the settlements during that year was three times as high as new construction in Tel Aviv and ten times higher than in Jerusalem.[9] Around 60 percent of the new construction costs were directly state-funded, provided by the same government that indefatigably vowed to create the necessary environment to achieve a lasting peace.[10]

A less intense, but an equally determined construction program was initiated in the Occupied Territories, including Gaza, and even within my father's own refugee camp, Nuseirat. In the Gaza Strip, tall buildings were erected on the outskirts of refugee slums, "export and import" companies were established by top PA officials and their cronies, who acquired massive funds from Western sources, with no accountability to anyone but themselves and their small band of benefactors. Lavish resorts, accessible only to the chosen few, were constructed as symbols of Palestinian economic independence, while the majority of the population struggled to survive. Indeed, Oslo had its rewards to those who chose the right side of peace. For those who made the "right" choice, the PA grew to embody the Palestinian cause, the Palestinian dream, even. Hundreds of millions of dollars were contributed by Western as well as Arab countries to strengthen the "moderates" and fight the "extremists" among Palestinians; much of the money was siphoned into private bank accounts,[11] and more was used to cement factional divides. In fact, Gaza, like the rest of the Occupied Territories, began defining itself according to a new maxim: pro-Oslo or anti-Oslo. Those who were seen as pro-Oslo found better positions in the PA's many ministries and security branches, and, accordingly, received PA funding and other perks (such as free tuition for university students), and were granted Israeli permits to move freely. Those who failed the Oslo test were shunned, alienated, and often imprisoned and tortured:

> The PA has indeed become a hotbed of graft and corruption year after year. Moreover, estimates indicate that hundreds of millions of dollars—most from foreign aid and development assistance—have been lost … due to corrupt governmental practices. In the past, several restructuring efforts have taken place but the changes in the Palestinian Legislative Council have been superficial at best, with ministers accused of impropriety remaining in positions of power, often at the bidding of the chairman himself.[12]

ALTERNATIVES?

While Oslo failed to establish itself as a physical entity, it undeniably dominated Palestinian society as a culture, a way of thinking and a contentious topic of debate. Only months into the employment of Oslo's political apparatus amongst Palestinians, few could truthfully talk of Oslo as a source of freedom, liberation and sovereignty. The peace sham was becoming too clear to conceal

with the sheer frequency of repeated slogans and rhetoric. Still, there was the problem of alternatives. In fact, "what is your alternative?" was the difficult question, presented repeatedly, and conveniently, by supporters of Oslo to anyone who had the audacity to doubt the wisdom of Fatah, Arafat and the PA. Some, especially on the Palestinian left, argued that the lack of an alternative shouldn't justify surrender and acceptance of defeat. For the Islamic movement in Gaza, as in the West Bank, however, an alternative was readily available, and unleashed at every turn. Hamas argued that resistance was the only solution, and quickly mobilized to defeat the Oslo scheme, positioning itself as the leader of Palestinian resistance, in all of its representations. Hamas' emergence as an "enemy of peace," challenged Arafat, and provided Israel with its most successful political tool, as Israel tirelessly pressured Arafat to rein in the "extremists." Although reluctant, Arafat often obliged, turning existing Palestinian friction into a deep, insurmountable chasm.

Hamas' leader, Ahmad Yassin, didn't object to the idea of a ceasefire between the Palestinians and Israel. In fact, despite the Islamists' tough language, Hamas, as indicated by its spiritual leader, was ready to sign a long-term ceasefire, in exchange for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem, to the pre-1967 borders.[13] Yassin's qualms, however, pertained to the unreservedly compromising nature of Oslo, which lead to no real Palestinian sovereignty over any part of Palestine. Yassin communicated his message to Arafat: that Hamas opposed the agreements signed with Israel because they ignored the primary issues, namely, Jerusalem as a capital of a future Palestinian state, the Palestinian right of return, defining the borders, and the dismantling of Israeli settlements.[14] He predicted that Oslo would in fact strengthen Israeli domination through Palestinian economic dependence, and warned that Israel would use Oslo to penetrate Arab and Muslim markets, while Palestinians would gain nothing of lasting value.[15]

Palestinian society has traditionally been divided between those who adhere to a secular way of life—concentrated mostly in urban centers, especially in the West Bank—and those who are moderately religious—concentrated mostly in refugee camps throughout the Occupied Territories, but primarily in the Gaza Strip. Despite common belief, Islamic fundamentalism, in its social, cultural, and even political manifestations, has hardly been a dominant force in Palestinian society. Oslo, however, polarized Palestinians into three camps: those who enthusiastically embraced Oslo because they personally benefited from it, those who accepted Oslo out of despair, recognizing its many faults, and those who rejected Oslo and vowed to defeat it at any cost. Palestinian society at large, however, was neither politically affiliated with those who embraced Oslo, nor ideologically allied to those who shunned it. Indeed, the middle group was placed in a most uncertain position, and was eventually forced to cope with a case of collective schizophrenia; its sense of survival compelled it to adapt to the PA's corrupt culture—for the latter became the largest employer in the Occupied Territories—and, at the same time, it grew clearly sympathetic to those who rejected Oslo. That sympathy was founded largely on political meeting-points, not necessarily religious ideals, which

also contributed to the overriding confusion that gripped Palestinian society. Oslo was perceived by its supporters as a critical agreement that ended years of Diaspora and isolation in the political wilderness, yet in some odd way—and despite the return of thousands of Palestinians to the Occupied Territories—Oslo had in fact alienated most Palestinians politically, and even ideologically. What was meant to end the fragmentation of Palestinian national identity, wittingly or otherwise, served the exact opposite. Indeed, for ordinary Palestinians, Oslo represented an identity crisis:

> Now, I have nothing any more. I have nothing to hope for. I have nothing to believe in. I am nothing. Six of my friends died in the struggle. For what? Nothing. All I used to believe in is crushed. We have an autonomous piece of land here, and a couple of other pieces there. We have no state, and if we ever get one, it will not be the one we fought for. Our leaders have become dictators, the democratic ideals of the Intifada are crushed. The occupation continues, but nobody cares about us. Our nationalism is dead. All those ideals which used to guide my life, don't exist anymore.[16]

PEACE IN PIECES

As Gaza society reeled under Oslo, Arafat and various PA officials continued their well-televised quest for peace. Even when the Jewish extremist Yigal Amir assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, on November 4, 1995,[17] Arafat vowed to carry on with his peace mission, this time with more vigor and greater resolve. In subsequent days and weeks, both Israel and the PA were credited for adhering to their previous commitments,[18] amid signs of international relief that the death of Rabin didn't scuttle the touted "achievements" of past years. But, despite the ample assurances of the continuation of the peace process, political and ideological clashes were brewing in both Israeli and Palestinian politics. New Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu narrowly defeated Shimon Peres in Israeli elections, held in May 1996. Netanyahu positioned himself as the Israeli leader who would bring an end to the "concessions" made by his rivals in the Labor Party. Palestinians, on the other hand, detected little improvement in their daily lives as a result of the alleged concessions. Hence, when the PA held its first elections in January 1996, few political movements agreed to participate. The biggest opposition to Arafat's PA and its peace apparatus continued to be Hamas, which despite the PA's many crackdowns, was still functional and growing more popular.

The clash of politics and ideology, in both Israeli and Palestinian societies, also manifested itself in violent ways as well. On February 25, 1994, an Israeli settler, Baruch Goldstein, gunned down scores of Palestinians who were praying in the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron. By killing many Palestinians, Goldstein, a member of the extremist Kach movement, hoped to bring the peace process to an end.[19] Israeli soldiers who arrived late to the grisly scene responded to angry Palestinian crowds by again opening fire, killing and wounded many more. The killing was reported as "the bloodiest single

incident in a quarter-century of Israeli occupation."[20] While Arafat reacted with strong condemnation and a demand for international observers, Hamas unleashed the then new phenomenon of suicide bombings. The Islamists were accused of using such bombings to achieve political ends and to manipulate election outcomes in Israel. Hamas leaders rejected the notion, contending that "martyrdom operations" were part and parcel of its overall strategy in responding to Israeli violence, and ridding Palestinian society of its occupiers: "When we decide to attack, we don't care whether it is Peres or Netanyahu in power. What we care about is how to defend ourselves and achieve the goals of our people … For us, Labor or Likud are the same. They are two faces of the same coin."[21]

Stripped of its land, its rights and even self-expression, Palestinian society was on the brink of implosion, which, initially expressed itself in the form of suicide bombings, but also through other platforms, violent and non-violent phenomena in later years. Those who opposed Arafat and dared to challenge the Israeli occupation were targeted and punished for their deeds for, Palestinians were told, their actions harmed the "national interests" of the Palestinian people. The PA still promised the fruits of Oslo, which were all relegated to the "final status talks."

But shortly before the final status talks were meant to commence, Israeli intelligence assassinated, with a booby-trapped telephone, Hamas's militant leader Yahya Ayyash in Gaza. Ayyash was accused of masterminding several suicide bombings that killed and wounded scores of Israelis.[22] The killing of Ayyash, who was also known as "the Engineer," represented a watershed moment in relations between Hamas and the Fatah-dominated PA. As Hamas expectedly retaliated by initiating several deadly bombings in Israel, the PA was pressured to crack down on the Islamic movement, as it in fact did. By assassinating Ayyash, Peres hoped to send a message to the Israeli voter that he, contrary to claims made by his Likud rival, was tough on security. Hamas's response, however, and the PA's crackdowns that followed, undermined both Peres and Arafat, and their peace process, altogether.

THE LIKUD IS BACK

The average Palestinian can almost never define the differences between a right-wing Likud government or a "left-wing" Labor government. What a farmer from the West Bank, or a refugee from Gaza, sees are soldiers and tanks, checkpoints, bulldozers, barbed wire, land confiscation orders and the same symbols of occupation and domination that never seem to change regardless of the ideological background or political leanings of those who rule Israel. But the advent of Netanyahu to the helm of Israeli politics, after narrowly defeating Peres in May 1996, must have mattered greatly to those who personally benefited from the Oslo industry and its generous revenues. Netanyahu, who served as Israel's prime minister up to May 1999, was an ill-intentioned leader. He rejected Oslo for all the wrong reasons. He regarded the agreements as "unfair" to Israel, and promised to reverse the "concessions"

made by his ostensibly ever-compromising predecessors. Seeking to provoke a sure Palestinian response, and thus Israeli closures and violence, Netanyahu initiated a series of new measures that didn't simply undermine the peace process, but Arafat as well. At the age of 46, Netanyahu was Israel's youngest prime minister ever. Although young and inexperienced, he represented a return to Zionist fundamentals, albeit with a modern twist:

> A master of the sound-bite and tough on rhetoric, the American-educated Netanyahu envisaged a model of the Likud shaped in the image of Jabotinsky's "iron wall" philosophy and Israel's pragmatic politics of the post-Oslo period. Netanyahu's father, Ben-Tzion, is an academic and long-time Revisionist, and the strong Revisionist legacy was passed from father to son. However, Netanyahu sought to modernize and change the hitherto crude approach of the Revisionist old guard and mold it using political vocabulary of the 1990s.[23]

Once elected, Netanyahu matched his tough rhetoric with detrimental actions. Like Begin and Shamir before him, he drew closer to Israel's far-right parties, which happily obliged, for the young politician had a stern anti-Oslo stance, describing Oslo as an "enormous lie" that constituted a "crime against Zionism."[24] He also drew plans to "devour Arab East Jerusalem and reduce its Arab population to insignificant minority." The plans also included the destruction of thousands of Arab homes, and the construction of thousands of Jewish houses. According to one of his advisors, the new construction impetus was based on one simple premise: "Every time he [Yasser Arafat] says Jerusalem is his, we will respond by building a thousand homes for Jews."[25]

However, Netanyahu came under American pressure to implement Oslo, presenting him with a major predicament. On one hand, he wished not to raise the ire of the US, which had invested much time and resources in Oslo; on the other, giving the slightest impression of honoring Oslo's diktats could endanger his seriously challenged position as a right-wing Likud leader. In September 1996, Netanyahu ordered the opening of a tunnel that ran underneath one of Islam's holiest shrines, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, further threatening the already devastated foundations of the sacred site. His act achieved its very purpose, for it ignited fury among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Several days of clashes resulted in the death and wounding of many, mostly Palestinians. The Israeli government used the incident to underscore Oslo's failure to meet Israel's security needs, especially as some PA police took the side of Palestinian protesters and dared to confront Israeli troops.[26]

Even the hasty signing of the Wye Memorandum Agreement in October 1998 caused further rifts in Israel, this time between Netanyahu and the right-wing extremist Ariel Sharon. Netanyahu was strongly criticized for his "concessions." To deny Sharon the opportunity to exploit the Wye Memorandum, Netanyahu delayed Israel's commitment and demanded the PA to live up to its share of the deal, which was sure to widen the rift between the PA and the anti-Oslo forces in Palestinian society. In his part, Sharon,

speaking on Israeli radio, urged the settlers to "grab more hills, expand the territory. Everything that's grabbed, will be in our hands. Everything we don't grab will be in their hands."[27]

The Wye, however, expected the PA to widen its repression of Palestinians under the guise of fighting terror:

> (a) The Palestinian side will make known its policy of zero tolerance for terror and violence against both sides. (b) A work plan developed by the Palestinian side will be shared with the U.S. and thereafter implementation will begin immediately to ensure the systematic and effective combat of terrorist organizations and their infrastructure. (c) In addition to the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation, a U.S.-Palestinian committee will meet biweekly to review the steps being taken to eliminate terrorist cells and the support structure that plans, finances, supplies and abets terror. In these meetings, the Palestinian side will inform the U.S. fully of the actions it has taken to outlaw all organizations (or wings of organizations, as appropriate) of a military, terrorist or violent character and their support structure and to prevent them from operating in areas under its jurisdiction. (d) The Palestinian side will apprehend the specific individuals suspected of perpetrating acts of violence and terror for the purpose of further investigation, and prosecution and punishment of all persons involved in acts of violence and terror. (e) A U.S.-Palestinian committee will meet to review and evaluate information pertinent to the decisions on prosecution, punishment or other legal measures which affect the status of individuals suspected of abetting or perpetrating acts of violence and terror.[28]

While Arafat's security forces launched yet another arrest campaign in the West Bank and Gaza, Netanyahu argued that he had never agreed on ending the expansion of settlements or the confiscation of Palestinian land. To appease the right wing and to undermine Sharon's anti-Wye position, he halted a vote in the Knesset meant to ratify the Memorandum. Moreover, on October 28, he approved the construction of thousands of new units in existing settlements and, later, the fortification of 33 settlements and construction of 13 new Jewish-only bypass roads.[29] Netanyahu also intensified his rhetoric, now that the Wye Memorandum was practically aborted. In January 1999, he threatened to annex most of the West Bank, reacting to suggestions that Palestinians might respond to Israeli unilateralism by declaring a state of their own. As election day in Israel drew near, Netanyahu gave orders to begin the construction of the Har Homa settlement, on the hill known to Palestinians as Abu Ghunaym, which lies between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Netanyahu's provocative moves were aimed at impressing Israeli voters through the complete isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. By then, and since the signing of the Wye Memorandum, Netanyahu's government had established 17 new "hilltop" settlements to completely cut off Jerusalem.[30] Palestinians' fury at Israeli actions, lack of faith in the US and its peace process, and mistrust of their incompetent leadership was reaching

its highest point. Yet in Israel, Netanyahu, despite all of his moves, failed to satisfy his constituency, and on May 17, 1999, Ehud Barak, leader of the Labor Party, was elected. Subsequently, Netanyahu resigned from the Likud leadership, and Sharon became the acting chairman of the party.[31]

As the Likud regrouped, US President Bill Clinton summoned Barak and Arafat, in July 2000, for a summit in Camp David. Each leader had his own motive for achieving a "breakthrough": for Clinton, it was a grand exit from the White House through another "historic" Camp David agreement.

Clinton propped up Barak as the Israeli leader who would be most capable of delivering peace, but ordinary Palestinians had few expectations, not least because of Barak's direct involvement in the assassination of various Palestinian resistance leaders in past years, including the top Fatah leader, Abu Jihad.[32] In his first official meeting with Arafat, at the Israel-Gaza Eretz crossing in July 1999, Barak was expected to implement the long-delayed Israeli redeployment in the West Bank. But past deadlines continued to be deferred; instead, another memorandum was signed in early September 1999, this time in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum provided a timetable and framework for the final peace agreement.[33] But when talks resumed, in November, Palestinians were outraged by Barak's proposal, which if implemented, would have divided the West Bank into three parts, and would allow for the many settlements dotting the West Bank to permanently remain in place. Thus, when Barak joined Arafat in Camp David, the latter knew fully well that Barak was neither ready nor willing to accommodate the Palestinian demands of complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the dismantling of the settlements, honoring right of return for Palestinian refugees, and so on. What Barak had tirelessly described as "painful compromises" didn't even meet the absolute minimum of Palestinian aspirations. In fact, Barak came to power with no decided peace agenda, but the same recycled rhetoric, which ultimately was similar to that of Netanyahu's before him:

> I tell you that the time for peace has come—not peace through weakness, but peace through might and a sense of security; not peace at the expense of security but peace that will bring security. We will move quickly toward separation from the Palestinians within four security red lines: a united Jerusalem under our sovereignty as the capital of Israel for eternity, period; under no conditions will we return to the 1967 borders; no foreign army west of the Jordan River; and most of the settlers in Judea and Samaria will be in settlement blocs under our sovereignty. In the long run, you, the people of Israel, will decide.[34]

BETRAYED

A few months after my arrival in the US, a call from my father woke me at some odd morning hour. "Why the hell are you still sleeping? Haven't you heard of the massacre?" he began. I assumed he was referring to new Israeli

army killings somewhere in the Occupied Territories. But in fact, he was referring to the killing of twelve Palestinians and the wounding of over a hundred others by Palestinian police in Gaza.[35] The PA police had confronted demonstrators who were denouncing Oslo, Arafat, and chanting for resistance and martyrs. The police responded to rocks and empty bottles with live bullets, in what seemed like an attempt to send a stern message to the Palestinians who opposed Oslo. The protest, which had followed Friday prayers, was dubbed the November Massacre.[36] Chances are some of those who were killed and wounded that day were among the many thousands who flocked to greet Arafat upon his return to the Strip only a few months earlier. My father spoke bitterly over the phone. His words were a mix of anger, cynicism, a sense of betrayal, and total disbelief. The man who had spent many years of his life fighting for Gaza, and challenging Israeli occupation on behalf of his community, couldn't believe himself as he uttered such words: a "Palestinian massacre committed by Palestinian police," that is, by those who had been welcomed into the Strip as liberators and protectors. His rage and resentment continued, and grew stronger over the years, but his sense of disbelief—at the fact that Palestinians are suffering because of the actions of other *Palestinians*, not only those of Israel—eventually diminished. He too learned to recognize the new Oslo reality, although he never accepted it. But he also grew dismayed and bitter over the fact that the many years of his personal struggle, which was meant to be crowned by a return to his village of Beit Daras, was to conclude with such a bleak ending. "I wish that I would have died before I saw this day," became his new and frequently evoked mantra.

12
The World as Seen From the Stone Staircase

Gaza and Mohammed's destinies were remarkably entwined. From the first moment he stepped into the new world of Gaza, as a refugee boy from some far-away village, his fate, and that of Gaza became as one: in desolation and prosperity, in anguish and hope, and also in rebellion.

Mohammed had always hoped that Nuseirat would be his last stop before returning to Beit Daras. The post-Oslo culture, however, impressed on the Palestinians, including Mohammed himself, new, pragmatic realizations, one of which was that the refugee camp was no longer a "temporary shelter" but a permanent one. While Mohammed had rejected the essence of that new understanding, and wholeheartedly rejected Oslo and the corrupt culture it espoused, he had resigned himself to the prospect that he was destined to die in Nuseirat.

Thus his joyless life lingered in Gaza. His daily chores were few, with one main highlight, consisting of sitting at the top of the six stone steps of his house, trying to lure passersby or equally bored neighbors to join him over a cup of black tea, where they would mull over the day's news. The stairs brought him a semblance of pleasure, where he, along with his older neighbors reminisced over the "good old days."

The staircase directly faced the graveyard. Zarefah, Anwar and both of his parents were all buried around the same location, at the center of the famed Martyrs Graveyard, surrounded by cactuses and hundreds of silenced refugees. Strangely, Mohammed both feared death and wished for it often, contradictions that were not unique to him, but shared by most Gazans. He often concerned himself with the fact that "all the good spots were quickly taken" in the graveyard and that when he died, he might be buried elsewhere, forever separated from his beloved wife, a notion that he dreaded.

His only child remaining in Gaza was Suma, who practiced medicine in a small clinic in the Khan Yunis refugee camp, in the southern part of the Strip. Despite the relatively short drive between Khan Yunis and Nuseirat (about 25 minutes), Suma and her father were separated by Israeli military checkpoints that cut the small Strip into even smaller fragments. Whenever the checkpoint opened, allowing Gazans to move freely, Suma would rush to her father's side, but would quickly return to her children and husband in Khan Yunis, before the checkpoint was sealed again. Despite frequent requests, Mohammed refused to join Suma in Khan Yunis or relocate anywhere else. No other place could replace his home in Nuseirat, or the sight of the graves of his loved ones.

While reaching his daughter and her family in Khan Yunis was trying, even more erratic was contact with his four sons staying in the West Bank. His oldest son, Anwar, now a supervisor of the orthopedic wing of one of Jerusalem's largest hospitals, had been married for many years. He had several children, the oldest of them a lovely girl named Sally. Although she was entering her teen years, Mohammed had never laid eyes on her, but learned of her studies, activities and latest news over the phone, along with the news of his many other grandchildren whom he would never meet. Alas, the relatively short distance between Gaza and the West Bank seemed as long as the earth is from the moon.

THE SECOND INTIFADA

In July 2000, following the failed final status negotiations between Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Israel accused the Palestinians of spurning a "generous offer" and resorting to violence, as a way of extracting more Israeli concessions.[1] As Arafat was busy defending himself against US-Israeli accusations of inciting violence as a tool of political pressure, Palestinian streets were on the verge of eruption. Ordinary Palestinians calculated that seven years of the peace process had achieved nothing. On the contrary, more land was lost by the year 2000 than was supposedly given by peace accords starting in 1993. In fact, the number of illegal settlers in the Occupied Territories had doubled in the "peace years."[2] Eager to push Palestinians further to the brink, then Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon led an army of over a thousand soldiers and police officers on a provocative "visit" to Islam's third holiest site, the Al-Haram Al-Sharif in occupied Arab East Jerusalem.[3] Considering that East Jerusalem was one of the thorniest issues in the final status negotiations, the Palestinian masses comprehended Sharon's gesture for its intended meaning, a denial of Palestinian sovereignty in the holy city. Palestinian streets exploded in fury, unleashing what became known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, in reference to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem's Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound.

Although Israel continued to accuse Arafat of orchestrating the Intifada, the international community disagreed. On October 7, 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1322, condemning Sharon's visit to the Muslim shrine and the Israeli military's excessive use of violence.[4] In fact, by the end of 2000, 279 Palestinians were killed, including 82 minors, and 41 Israelis.[5] Barak's bloody response to the Intifada may or may have not been motivated by his true belief that Arafat was in fact behind the violence. What truly worried him was that Israeli voters would punish him in the country's general elections as a response to his "soft" stance on "terror," an accusation that Sharon deployed successfully throughout the February 2001 election campaign. Barak's heavy-handed tactics in crushing the Intifada didn't suffice, and Sharon was crowned Israel's new prime minister, promising the preservation of Jerusalem as an exclusively Jewish city, and "security and

true peace," as well as crushing the Intifada and absolving Israel from past agreements with the Palestinian leadership.[6]

Predictably, Sharon's even more lethal tactics failed to achieve any of his campaign promises, save a greater death toll. By the end of August 2001, 495 Palestinians and 154 Israelis had been killed.[7] International attempts at sending UN observer forces were thwarted by a US veto, on March 27, thus paving the way for the Israeli army to thrash its way into Palestinian refugee camps and other areas formerly controlled by the Palestinian Authority.[8]

Even when besieged Gaza became an open field for Israel's heavy bombardment, Mohammed would sit atop the stone stairs and smoke. The Strip was sealed from all directions, and Mohammed's only outlet within the confined place, aside from wandering into the few remaining orchards when seeking safety from the bombs and missiles—as many Gazans did—was his daughter's house in Khan Yunis. Alas, the Khan Yunis refugee camp's fate was even worse than that of Nuseirat.

A MIDNIGHT CHASE

Like Nuseirat, and the rest of Gaza's refugee camps, the Khan Yunis refugee camp was founded as a "temporary shelter" for Palestinian refugees following the Nakba of 1948. But the tiny space of a few tents grew, over months and years, to become the home of tens of thousands of refugees and their descendants. For a stranger to wander through its narrow alleyways and makeshift structures, past the mounting garbage piles and impoverished streets and markets, one would then realize that human misery is not an abstract concept, but a living reality. During the second Intifada, Khan Yunis was repeatedly assaulted. In mid-April 2001, Israeli forces entered Khan Yunis camp, "leaving a trail of death and destruction."[9]

Khan Yunis's plight was highlighted when illegal Jewish settlements—the Gush Katif settlement bloc—grew in size and opulence. To "secure" the illegal settlements, the Israeli army continued to terrorize the refugees. Settlers armed to the teeth and flanked by squads of soldiers would often come to the shops and homes of the people of Khan Yunis, breaking their windows, setting fire to their orchards, desecrating the entire place with their graffiti: "Arab Dogs," "Death to the Arabs," and so forth. Palestinian lands near the settlements were contracting over time, as lands were stolen to make way for the settlements' "natural expansion," exclusive roads, security zones, and so on. Then the Al-Aqsa Intifada exploded.

Like much of Gaza, Khan Yunis daringly resisted; the resumption of a life as normal as possible was a prime form of resistance—going to the market, cleaning up the mess left behind from the settlers and then moving on. The simple refusal to surrender was the most poignant form of resistance of all. Israel's assaults grew more intense and deadly. Three months after the outbreak of the Intifada, Israel began using strange gases never previously employed in punishing Palestinians, and the residents of Khan Yunis were the

main subjects of the experiment.[10] Many cases of patients with mysterious symptoms were reported:

> In Khan Yunis, the Israeli occupation forces used a new and more virulent tear gas against Palestinian civilians. According to field reports and medical sources at Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis, dozens of Palestinian civilians, including children under 15, suffered from tear gas inhalation with unusually severe symptoms. These unique symptoms included convulsions throughout the body, difficulties in breathing and pains in the abdomen. Dozens of Palestinian civilians remain in hospitals in Khan Yunis because Palestinian physicians are not able to determine the proper course treatment in these cases. The Palestinian [medical] community lacks the technical means to identify it.[11]

The camp was also cut off from the rest of the Gaza Strip, and was repeatedly pounded, often by Apache helicopters. Many people—civilians, fighters, old and young—were killed and many homes were destroyed. The Israeli government justified its action as self-defense. Ariel Sharon's defense minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer decided to "go in and destroy the same posts from which our communities were shelled." That meant the bulldozing of most of the camp. Ben-Eliezer told reporters following the wide-scale destruction in Khan Yunis, "There are points we don't want Palestinians to return to."[12]

But where were the refugees to go? Although left physically unharmed, Suma and her family were chased to a nearby area in the middle of the night. But not all of Khan Yunis's residents were so lucky. "We started running from our homes, while they were firing toward us and bulldozers started destroying our homes without giving us warning," said a father of seven who lost his home during the Israeli assault, which destroyed many other homes and killed several Palestinians.[13]

The above words could have been uttered to describe many such violent occasions in the past or in later years. Only the names of the victims change, although sometimes that too stays the same. And true to form, the refugees of Khan Yunis, including Suma and her family, returned the next morning to their destroyed neighborhoods, salvaging half-burnt blankets, pots, pans and pillows. Some gazed at the wreckage, pondering how they could find the strength to start all over again.

Mohammed was relieved to discover that Suma and her family survived the midnight ordeal. His Nuseirat neighbors knew that Suma was living in the devastated refugee camp, and rushed to his side with words of support and solidarity. The old man's often lonely spot on the stairs grew more popular as he narrated the horror experienced in the neighboring camp with all of its details, as conveyed to him over the phone by Suma. Mohammed coveted company, and for a while he had some stories to tell.

RESPITE

Violence in the Occupied Territories was worsening. In the last three months of 2001 alone, 252 Palestinians and 75 Israelis were killed,[14] as a number of Palestinian suicide bombers began penetrating Israeli towns and blowing themselves up in crowded streets. Ironically, the Strip was experiencing some respite (by Gaza's standards, anyway), for the Israeli army was consumed with reoccupying the "liberated" areas of the West Bank. In March and April 2002, Sharon ordered Operation "Defensive Wall," which resulted in major military incursions into most West Bank cities, causing massive destruction and unprecedented bloodletting. The Israeli operation led to the killing of hundreds of Palestinians, the reoccupation of major Palestinian towns, and the destruction of Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah, and the subsequent besiegement of the Palestinian leader in his barely standing office.[15] Israel's figurative military "wall" was matched by an actual wall: a massive structure of concrete, trenches, barbed wire and watchtowers that invaded many parts of the West Bank. While Israel justified its wall as necessary to prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel, few in the human rights community were convinced, arguing that the wall was a *de facto* annexation of Palestinian land:

> The wall serves purposes that go way beyond any Israeli security needs. The wall consolidates Israel's illegal settlements through the illegal confiscation of land. The wall severs the ties of thousands of Palestinians from their homes, schools, families, towns, farms, and water. Future stages of the wall, carefully held secret by the Israeli government but discerned by the careful examination of military land confiscation orders (and reported upon by B'tselem, the Israeli human rights organization), indicate that the final stages of the wall are planned to completely surround the Palestinians and divide them into cantons and ghettos, permanent prisoners and refugees in their own land. The final stages of the wall don't even get close to Israel's own border on the Green line.[16]

"WATCH WHAT THEY DO"

Mohammed had taken a brief furlough from the stairs to fetch a few items from the Nuseirat market, when a suffocating gas fell all around him. He immediately fell unconscious and later discovered that some young men had pulled him through the muddy streets of the camp, as Israeli troops chased behind the crowds. As grateful as he was to his saviors, he was equally embarrassed by the spectacle of his public humiliation. He lost both his special glasses and Egyptian cane in the ordeal. Such experiences compelled him to amend his expectations, not just of his physical abilities, but of hope itself. One lesson he was never to forget was to be ever-wary of Israeli politicians. "Don't listen to what they say, but watch what they do," he would counsel. For example, in February 2004, when Sharon announced that he intended to

evacuate Gaza's 21 illegal Jewish settlements, Mohammed, like most Gazans, hardly rejoiced. He was convinced that such terminology as "disengagement" and "withdrawal" were euphemisms for some other policies. Nonetheless, considering the suffocating Israeli siege and bloodshed invited by the existence of those settlements, he wished, with great modesty, that if such evacuation indeed was actualized, life in Gaza would become a bit more bearable. His doubts, however, were too great to be overrode with unfounded hopes; after all, by the end of the third year of the Intifada, 2,235 Palestinians and 795 Israelis had been killed.[17] Israeli assassinations of Intifada leaders gave the killings an even more harrowing twist, as more Gazan homes, cars and shops began exploding, with no warning.

When Sharon declared his disengagement plan, he was initially criticized by the PA for acting unilaterally. But like the rest of Israel's unilateral-moves, soon it became the new reality, to which Palestinians had to adjust. Even during the "peace years," under Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu and Barak, unilateral action was the strand that unified Israeli government policies, marred with settlement expansion, military crackdowns, closures, and so on. But unilateral or not, Mohammed repeatedly expressed that he was pleased with the news of Sharon's disengagement. Not that Mohammed, even fleetingly, thought that Israel intended to leave Gaza for good, but he still put a positive spin on the news. Without the stubborn resistance of Gazans, Israel would have remained in the Strip for many more years. For Mohammed, the disengagement plan was a testimony to the resilience of his people. However, as for its political dimension, he understood that the plan was a smokescreen for Israel's relentless colonization of the West Bank. He was not alone with such a bleak assessment.

Indeed, Sharon had his own calculations, and none were linked to peace. Gaza was a security nightmare for his army, and Gaza's 1.5 million inhabitants tipped the demographic balance in a way that jeopardized Israel's all-pervading challenge of retaining its Jewish majority, hence racial domination, in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. But what ultimately mattered for Mohammed was that he lived to see the day when Israel retreated before the insurmountable resistance of Gaza, one with which he strongly identified. Mohammed brimmed with pride, as he insisted that the battle for freedom was not over, but there was no harm in claiming even a small semblance of a moral victory.

YASSIN

But Israel was not to leave quietly, much to the dissatisfaction of Mohammed and most Gazans. Sharon's government wanted to send a clear message to the jubilant resistance in Gaza that its disengagement was an outcome of Israel's strategic interests, and not in any way related to Gaza's steadfastness or its people's resistance. On March 22, 2004, an Israeli helicopter dropped three camera-guided missiles on the quadriplegic spiritual leader of Hamas, mutilating him, blowing his wheelchair to smithereens, and killing two other

people. Yassin was attending the dawn prayer at a Gaza mosque.[18] Yassin's murder was meant to fragment Hamas, as Arafat's absence did Fatah. Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, Hamas's top political leader and a close confidant of Yassin, was also assassinated, on April 17, 2004. His car was hit by two rockets fired from an Israeli helicopter.[19] Other top Hamas leaders were also killed in similar tactics. Sharon was paving the way for a "clean" disengagement.

Israel proceeded with its violent policies, truly believing that if it just applied the needed dosage of violence, rebelling Palestinians would eventually repent or surrender. But nothing could be further from the truth. Even the 17-day Israeli onslaught in northern Gaza, which commenced on September 28, 2004 and resulted in the killing of scores of Palestinians,[20] merely served to widen Gaza's revolt, harden its slogans and intensify its resistance:

> Israel's military assault "Days of Penitence," was launched in northern parts of the Gaza Strip on 28 September, resulting in one of Gaza's bloodiest events since the start of the Intifada … Israeli officials have described this military operation as "open ended." The assault is directed at Jabaliya refugee camp, home to more than 100,000 Palestinian refugees. Israel intends to create a 9-km "buffer zone" around the refugee camp, continuing its scorched earth policy in the Gaza Strip ahead of its "disengagement."[21]

The widespread killing and massive destruction came at a time that Gaza was sinking deeper into poverty:

> The United Nations has warned in a special report (issued October 2004) of an impending humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. It says as many as 72% of Palestinians will be living in poverty by the end of 2006, and that Israeli restrictions are hampering emergency aid deliveries. Compiled by 12 UN agencies, the report calls on Israel to allow the agencies free access throughout the Strip. The report says residents have difficulty finding work, exporting goods, moving around Gaza and sending their children to school. Currently, 66% of Palestinians in Gaza live on less than $2 a day—the UN-defined poverty line.[22]

Although human suffering cannot be reduced to mere numbers, Gaza paid the highest price during the Second Intifada:

> In 2004, an average of 45 Palestinians died every month in fighting. In September 2004, 133 homes were destroyed by the Israeli army, 807 Palestinians were made homeless. 24,547 Gazans have been made homeless in the last four years by Israeli army house demolitions.[23]

Out of a total of 4792 Palestinians killed by Israel between September 29, 2000 and December 26, 2008, 3000 were killed in Gaza.[24]

NUMBERS DO COUNT

One would think that a place seemingly accustomed to death like Gaza would tire from keeping track of its victims, especially when there are so many to count. But the Strip's victims, old or new, are never mere numbers, but people with names, faces and families; their posters adorn the scruffy and decaying walls of every refugee camp. The martyrs' photographs are always portrayals from their happiest of times, dressed in their best outfits, smiling, or flashing the peace sign. In Palestinian tradition, martyrs are to be remembered for their good deeds, pleasant and happy moments.

However, it was difficult to adhere to the unspoken maxim every time I called my father and learned of the friends, neighbors and sometimes relatives who had most recently been killed or wounded in the violence. From a distance, Gaza appears to be one large prison, and one massive funeral home. There is much truth to that, of course, but in Gaza, tragedies are shared equally between its people. One person's loss becomes everyone's. This is one of Gaza's everlasting traits, and another coping mechanism that has allowed its people to endure for so long, with the same determination to prevail.

From afar, Gaza's reality, like that of all of Palestine, is often presented without cohesion, without proper context; accounts of real life in Gaza are marred with tired assumptions and misrepresentations that deprive the depicted humans of their names, identities and very dignity. But it is not only humans who are casually reduced and misrepresented, but events as well. From the Al-Aqsa Intifada's early days and throughout its historical course, whether under the governments of Barak or Sharon (both presiding over equally lethal periods), the Israeli story was dominant and consistent. It asserted: Yasser Arafat orchestrated the Intifada; he had no intentions of reaching a final and comprehensive peace agreement with Israel, that is why he turned down "a very generous" offer presented by Barak at Camp David (July 2000); at present, there is no Palestinian peace partner; Israel must do all it can to protect its citizens, even if it must seek peace unilaterally; hence, Ariel Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan. Every Israeli policy, political or military, was somehow explained and defended within these few lines. Within this discourse, neither Mohammed nor millions of Palestinians exist; they are either completely omitted, as if a negligible irritant, or exist on the margins. If Palestinians ever take center stage, the media assign them the role of the "terrorist" or the "bystander," whose deaths are squarely blamed on the imprudence of their leadership.

Nothing was to change these flawed and incomplete depictions. It mattered little that there was no "generous offer," even if such statements were made by the likes of Robert Malley, special assistant to President Bill Clinton for Arab-Israeli Affairs and his advisor at Camp David. "It is hard to state with confidence how far Barak was actually prepared to go," Malley wrote in an article published in the *New York Review of Books*. "His strategy was predicated on the belief that Israel ought not reveal its final position—not even to the United States—until the endgame was in sight."[25]

It also mattered little that the redundant accusation that "there is no Palestinian peace partner" was also a fabrication. According to the former chief of the Israeli Military Intelligence, Amos Malka, it was Amos Gilad, the head of the research section at the MI office who concocted the adage that the Palestinians were not partners in the peace process, and that Arafat was hell-bent on the destruction of Israel. Malka, in an interview with the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz*, asserts that Gilad had no basis whatsoever for his assertions, save his own personal views.[26]

However, the status quo that controlled much of the narrative in both Israel and the United States was adamant in refusing to recognize Mohammed's humanity and the humanity and welfare of millions like him, and insisted on adhering to the Israeli verdict, however senseless, however deceptive. Therefore, the Middle East "Quartet"—the UN, the EU, Russia and the US—continued to recognize the Israeli doctrine as the conventional wisdom, cheered for disengagement without questioning Sharon's ulterior motives, and worse, acknowledged Israel's painful "concessions" with an interminable gratitude.

Mohammed, at times, grew wary of news. When I called him to discuss comments made by Dov Weisglass, Israel's former chief of staff, and Sharon's closest personal advisor, he seemed disinterested and tried to change the subject. Weisglass had told *Haaretz* that the disengagement plan was intended to "freeze" the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, to guarantee that 80 percent of the West Bank's illegal Jewish settlements remained in place and to eradicate any possibility of establishing an independent Palestinian state; all that with the knowledge and "blessing" of the United States government:

> What I affectively agreed to with the Americans was that part of the settlements would not be dealt with at all, and the rest will not be dealt with until Palestinians turn into Finns … [The disengagement plan] supplied the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians … [As a result] you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem.[27]

I was particularly frustrated, although never truly surprised, by this statement, by the fact that it had little influence on how the Gaza story was being told in the US media, and the fact that my father treated it as if it were old news. But my father needed no written proof that Israel had the "blessings" of the US at every turn; he shared with me several stories to demonstrate his point. He reminded me of my childhood collection of empty bullet shells and tear-gas ganisters all courtesy of the US; he named various US-supplied Israeli weapons, notwithstanding the deadly Apaches that terrorized his refugee camp for years. Neither my father, nor the rest of Gaza, needed an indictment of the Israeli-US "partnership" that had controlled their lives for generations.

ARAFAT AND MOHAMMED

Like many Palestinians, Mohammed had a love-hate relationship with Yasser Arafat. On one hand, he admired the man for what he perceived as his principled stances of the past; he would occasionally defend Arafat's shortcomings as outcomes of extremely intricate and hostile political environments, created or facilitated by various Arab regimes. But Mohammed would also, frequently, lash out at Arafat, the corruption of his Fatah circle and the many blunders their post-Oslo institution had wrought on the very fabric of Palestinian society. And then, once again, he would argue that Arafat's political concessions had boundaries that the aging leader would not dare cross.

Mohammed's resentment of and yet subtle affinity towards Arafat might have been related to the fact that he saw himself, to a degree, a reflection of the Palestinian leader: rife with contradictions, sincere to the core, and having made many mistakes of his own. But the two men, though they never met, had even more in common: they were both physically confined—Arafat under an imposed Israeli siege, in his bullet-riddled office in the West Bank, and Mohammed in a refugee camp in Gaza, living in a house that was also riddled with Israeli bullets. Both were also members of the same generation, who grew up speaking of a Nakba, suffering and resistance. Hence, when Arafat was flown to France for urgent medical treatment, in October 2004, Mohammed himself could personally relate to the notion that it was an end of an era.

Arafat's subsequent death, on November 11, 2004, was an opportunity for the man's legacy to be callously analyzed in news media and academic fora around the world. But for Mohammed, and many like him, there was more to Arafat than that of a revolutionary-turned-statesman, an autocratic Arab ruler, clinging to his position, refusing to share power or to allocate responsibility to anyone other than his cronies, with nothing new to offer save the worn-out rhetoric about a "light at the end of the tunnel" and the "mountain [that] cannot be shaken by the wind." These were the dispassionate designations, accurate or otherwise, that mattered little to ordinary Gazans. Gaza, of course, saw Arafat in a different light; even those who unreservedly opposed his political line and unqualified peace offerings couldn't hide their emotions when the news of the man's death spread on the Strip. Earlier, when a military helicopter hauled him out of his headquarters in Ramallah to be treated abroad, ending a three-year-long Israeli siege, many Palestinians associated Arafat's last departure to the everlasting discourse of dispossession in which many of them suffered. Mohammed, who never missed an opportunity to question Arafat's personal initiatives, seemed reserved. He had nothing ill to say of the man. Instead, he was reflective: if Arafat's odyssey ended in such a way, who is to say that the Palestinian odyssey was fated to fare any better?

But Arafat's burial in Ramallah amid chants of "With our soul, with our blood, we will support you Abu Ammar," was hardly the last time that Mohammed brought up the name of Yasser Arafat. As was the case for many

Palestinians, Arafat's aura surpassed his death and continued to exist, separate from the man himself. Mohammed incessantly recalled Arafat's name and various qualities, but in a more sympathetic way than usual. He, like most Palestinians, believed that Arafat was poisoned. Not that Mohammed relied on any physical evidence in his reasoning; but his deduction had its own logic: if Arafat's absence was unanticipated, then why was his death followed by a clearly rehearsed political charade, in which every player assumed a designated role?

Mahmoud Abbas—a touted moderate who showed readiness to accede to the most generous political concessions, to which even Arafat himself didn't agree—was immediately celebrated as a successor, and entrusted with redefining the post-Arafat era. Indeed, the atmosphere created by the Palestinian presidential election in January 2005 was further evidence of that charade. Arafat's death and Abbas's advent were greeted with relief in Tel Aviv.[28] It is "good that the world is rid of him. The sun is shining in the Middle East," said the Israeli opposition leader at the time, Shimon Peres.[29] And since the Middle East sun was shining again, talks resumed of the peace process and the implementation of the long-disregarded "Road Map" for peace, which had been introduced by US President George Bush in 2002, as a response to those who criticized his administration for its lack of peace overtures in the Middle East. The Road Map had originally envisaged a final peace agreement in 2005, but conditioned any progress on ending Palestinian terrorism and violence first.[30] Inevitably, no progress was ever made to implement the agreement—it was merely used to highlight Palestinian failure to guarantee Israeli security.[31]

The PA under Abbas agreed to the Road Map's unequal conditions, despite the fact that Israel's reciprocations were fundamentally hinged on Palestinian actions. Israel's initial response to the initiative was hesitation, long deliberations, and then a conditioned acceptance, 14 conditions, in fact, that altered the already unreasonable scheme.[32] But the Israeli "approval" of the Road Map was still celebrated as a victory for peace, and was perceived as consistent with Israel's supposedly "painful compromises" of the past.

Of course, the Road Map was neither the first nor the last of such dramas that were always associated with the peace process theater of many years. Alas, the path to peace in the Middle East is saturated with staged shows thoroughly divorced from the reality on the ground, as witnessed in the slums of Gaza and the walls and trenches of the West Bank. In fact, the overrated meaning of the Palestinian election—following Arafat's death—almost fully conformed to these past experiences. The unstated message of the elections was: only by altering their backward political culture and fully committing to the everlasting principles of democracy can Palestinians be worthy peace partners; only by being at peace with themselves and ending their unsubstantiated squabble, can Palestinians arrive at peace with Israel; only by isolating and shunning the anti-democratic elements in their midst can Palestinians be creditable neighbors to the "only democracy" in the Middle East. And once again, Israel was asked to do little in return, save some mythical steps

of reciprocity and "confidence-building" measures devoid of any real value that the oppressed in Gaza could taste, feel, or in any way truly appreciate.

But the crowning of Abbas as president was hardly the missing component needed for the peace process to resume. The new president still required US-sponsored international legitimacy, thus a well-orchestrated summit was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in February 2005, to delegate the new partners of peace to their historic mission. In his statement, Abbas practically announced the end of the Second Intifada.[33] But most Palestinians were unimpressed; from the point of view of ordinary Palestinians, the summit was a failure for it neither succeeded, nor even attempted, to address the main grievances that had defined the Palestinian national struggle for generations: an end to occupation, the right of return, and the removal of the settlements, among others. The summit was almost exclusively devoted to tired discussions of Israel's security. Abbas's partnership was needed insofar as it provided a cover for Israel to carry out its already predetermined policies, the "disengagement" from Gaza, and the like, under the auspices of international consensus and Palestinian conformity. Despite his many mistakes, Arafat had, at least, a level of moral boundaries. Abbas had none. It was within this worrisome context that Mohammed would invoke Arafat's name. "If Arafat was still alive, he would never go this far," or "no wonder why they killed Arafat," were but a few of the many statements repeated in Gaza as Abbas claimed his new role: he, unlike Arafat, was a "peace maker." Since such pronouncements were made in Washington and Tel Aviv, Palestinians feared the worst.

HAMAS IN POLITICS

Remarkably, but deliberately, Mohammed steered clear from factional politics. He came from the old school of having no loyalty to anyone or anything other than Palestine. His readings, writings and the very language he used whenever he discussed politics all were testimony to his devotion to his homeland. However, and despite his fragile religious beliefs, he saw in Hamas a new expression of defiance, one with which he could personally identify. Mohammed's utter frustration with Abbas helped cement his approving views of Hamas. While Hamas presented Mohammed with something to relate to—a culture of resistance, juxtaposed with the culture of "compromise" and "pragmatism" born out of Oslo—it presented Abbas with a sizable dilemma. On one hand, Abbas wished to co-opt Hamas to achieve the urgently needed mandate which would allow him to deal with Israel, unhindered. On the other, Hamas had its own calculations. For years after Oslo was signed, Hamas resolved to disassociate itself with any Oslo-created political institutions. Following Arafat's death, there was general willingness to engage Oslo's political institutions with the very aim of overhauling Palestinian political culture. The ultimate aim was, perhaps, to remove Oslo entirely from Palestinian political consciousness.

Hamas's first political involvement came in December 2004, when it participated with a great degree of success in the first round of local elections

in Gaza. Mohammed enthusiastically voted for Hamas, of course, and did so proudly. His vote for Hamas was symptomatic of the shift in Gazan society at the time, ready to rid itself of corruption and once again redefine the terms of resistance, with all of its manifestations. But the shift was also pertinent to the way that Hamas began perceiving its own role, as Fatah descended into chaos.

The crucial moment was, once again, Arafat's death. Arafat's sudden absence brought to the surface an array of internal conflicts within his own party, Fatah. This revealed itself in open power struggles between the movement's traditional, elitist leadership—labeled the "old guard"—and the younger generation. Turmoil was forthcoming, with Fatah militants shifting their focus from battling the Israeli military dominion in the Occupied Territories to allying themselves with local offshoots that in one way or another claimed a link to the increasingly fractious political party.

Considering that Fatah's corruption, factionalism and many rifts were largely alien concepts in Hamas's political and social circles, Palestinians voted for the latter in droves. The outcome of the first three rounds of elections gave Hamas over a third of the Occupied Territories' municipal seats, including most of the major cities.[34] Hamas's initial electoral successes alarmed Israel, which demanded that Abbas "dismantle" the movement. However, Abbas lacked the moral authority of Arafat, and was unpopular among his own supposed constituency. He knew that challenging Hamas would cost him much-needed legitimacy amongst skeptic Palestinians. More, Hamas had adhered to a one-sided ceasefire with Israel and refrained from suicide bombings;[35] any major provocation could jeopardize that commitment, thus embarrassing Abbas internationally. On the other hand, Israel had declared its intentions to "disengage" from Gaza—a military maneuver whose precise meaning was still unclear—starting in August 2005; a renewed Hamas violent resistance could serve as an excuse to delay the highly anticipated Israeli move. But most importantly, Palestinian parliamentary elections were scheduled for January 2006. Unpopular Abbas and a fractious Fatah were likely to suffer at the voting booth. While Hamas's political clarity grew, Abbas's dilemma greatened.

FREEDOM DEFERRED

Abbas hoped that an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, however incomplete, could serve him well in the parliamentary elections that followed. But Abbas, who spoke of the Gaza "disengagement" as "liberation" was not the only one to acknowledge Israel's move as a step in the right direction. Media throughout the world looked in disbelief—and some admiration—as Israeli forces and police clashed with Jewish settlers in Gaza, who fought evacuation orders. "Israeli vs. Israeli in Gaza," read a *Christian Science Monitor* headline.[36] But neither Gazans, long-familiar with such pretenses, nor many others, were so foolish as to miss Sharon's overriding point behind the television footage:

> There is no escaping the simple conclusion. It is in [Sharon's] interests that TV screens in Israel and all over the world show the scenes of the terrible riots. That's how he sows in the heads of the viewers the natural question, "If the evacuation of a few small settlements causes such a huge uproar—how can one even dream of removing the big settlements in the West Bank?"[37]

In Gaza, thousands of refugees waited by the settlements as they were being evacuated. In the Nuseirat refugee camp, youths clashed with Israeli soldiers at dawn as they finalized the evacuation of the settlement of Netzarim in late August. Netzarim had for 33 years created a wedge in central Gaza Strip. Its hyped security, guarded by hundreds of Israeli soldiers, had terrorized the refugees of the Strip for many years, causing endless military curfews and devastating many lives. The final withdrawal happened late at night. Still, thousands of Palestinians from Nuseirat and elsewhere descended on the settlement, and, in a last show of defiance, clashed with retreating Israeli soldiers, throwing stones and reciting victory chants.

Salem, a young man from Nuseirat, recalled his feelings after entering the settlement late that night:

> I don't know where all the bravery came from, but I walked towards the settlement after midnight. It was very dark, and I thought all of Nuseirat was still asleep. I thought I wanted to be the first person to set foot into the settlement once the soldiers were gone. But once I cross the highway, separating Nuseirat and Buraij refugee camps, and drew near, I discovered that I was not the only one who wished to be the first to cross into Netzarim. Crowds had already arrived and hundreds of youths clashed with Israeli soldiers who opened fire. I hurried to arrive there. The people were so happy that Netzarim was evacuated but so angry that it took this long and caused so much harm. When the soldiers left, the crowds began chanting, and some began demolishing some of the still-standing walls. The Israelis took everything with them, and frankly we couldn't care less. We didn't want traces of them in that area anyway. I was astounded to see the signs of the lavish lifestyle the settlers enjoyed as we [were] suffocating in our slums. Suddenly I walked into a small mango farm. Can you believe it? They were growing mangos while we were denied clean water. I must have eaten a thousand mangos that night. I would pluck a mango off a tree, take one bite, and throw it away, and then another, and another. It seems strange, I don't even like mangos. But it wasn't about the fruit, I just wanted to vent somehow. I wanted to a claim a victory of any sort.[38]

Mohammed too labored to walk to Netzarim, a few days later. He was accompanied by neighbors, as he walked up and down the lush fields of the once notorious settlement. There was something gratifying about the experience. This land had been seized by Israel decades ago. Throughout the years, many Gazans had been shot at close proximity to the settlement.

Mohammed and thousands like him visited the ruins of the empty settlement, vindicated in the belief that the many years of struggle had paid off, even if in so humble a way. Netzarim, a settlement that engulfed a sizeable portion of the Gaza Strip, had just a few hundred settler inhabitants. The land mostly consisted of vast orchards of fruit trees, produce that was exported throughout Israel, generating vast amounts of money and consuming huge amounts of Gazan water.

After Netzarim was cleared of settlers, the place became a hub for local Gaza tourism. On the weekends, throngs of people gathered there to show their children the remains of what had been the source of so much harm and pain for many years, a paradoxical kind of memorial. Families would bring picnics and spend the day, and as the place grew in popularity local entrepreneurs set up shop there; falafel stalls, and ice cream and popcorn stands dotted the area and enjoyed good business.

But almost immediately following the Israeli army redeployment out of Gaza, a power-struggle ensued between the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority and Hamas. The former wished to galvanize on the Israeli move politically, while Hamas wanted the Israeli "withdrawal" to register in the Palestinian collective psyche as a victory for the resistance, a victory that would be equal in meaning, if not in magnitude, to that of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Among the poor and destitute refugees throughout the Occupied Territories and in Diaspora, the Hamas narrative was the most prevailing. "If I had the strength to dance, I would have danced, but you know what? I am going to dance anyway," my father laughed and joked over the phone in a rare moment of happiness. He was immensely proud. Gazans could genuinely speak of a liberated part of Palestine. Gazans, however, qualified their festivity as that of a celebration of the moral victory that military occupation may last for decades but will someday end, that the blood and sacrifices of many years will eventually pay off.

But Gaza's triumph was incomplete. Sharon was adamant in ensuring that Gazans didn't go too far in their interpretation of the Israeli redeployment. Almost immediately after the Gaza pullout, Israeli forces carried out several assaults on Gaza. The deadly raids and bombardments, joined with Israeli air force jets breaking the sound barrier over the Gaza sky were meant as a cruel reminder of Israel's sheer military advantage over the incarcerated population of the Strip. The Israeli government cited the continued firing of crude rockets from Gaza as an explanation for its deadly attacks, but Gazans, still incarcerated and besieged, had no reason to halt their resistance.[39]

Lest they bought into the illusion that the "disengagement" was the start of a positive policy change, the Palestinians were struck by a disturbing realization, that the US official policy no longer recognized Palestinian territorial rights in the occupied West Bank as stipulated in international law. The bold US assertion was meant to pacify angry settlers: that what happened in Gaza would not be repeated in the West Bank. The then outgoing US ambassador to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer, made himself very clear when he said that the "United States will support the retention by Israel of areas with a high concentration

of Israelis." Kurtzer, speaking to Israeli Radio on September 18—less than a week after the pullout from Gaza—read a passage to listeners from a letter the US president had sent to Sharon in April 2004, where Bush declared that it was "unrealistic to expect that the outcome of the final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949," and where he also bluntly rejected the Palestinian refugees' right to return in accordance with UN Resolution 194.[40]

The former head of Israel's National Security Council, Uzi Dayan (who in 2002 recommended a one-sided withdrawal from Gaza), offered further insight and a more candid translation of Kurtzer's comments. In a press conference in Tel Aviv on September 20, 2004, Dayan proposed an Israeli withdrawal from minor settlements in the West Bank and the creation of a *de facto* border that would claim much Palestinian land as Israeli territory. This new territory would envelop the lands hosting the illegal Jewish settlements of Ma'ale Adumim, Ariel, Kiryat Arba and Bet El, among others, and along with them nearly 200,000 Jewish settlers. According to Dayan's computation, 28 Palestinian towns would be divorced from their Palestinian space, to become part of Israel.[41] Considering the atrocious outcome created by the illegal Israeli wall and the accompanying land theft, Israel's future plans for the West Bank and Jerusalem constituted new injustices with painfully lasting consequences.

"ORDINARY LIVES"

Mohammed's health continued to deteriorate. On a few occasions, he traveled to Cairo to see a specialist. However, such trips were costly and were extremely difficult to facilitate in terms of logistics, requiring special permits and intense coordination between various health and political authorities involving the PA, Israel and Egypt. Repeated and prolonged Israeli closures of the Rafah border point, which links the Strip to Egypt, at times made such a simple wish mostly unattainable. He often thought it would be most prudent to do what his life-long late friend had done a few years before.

Abu Ashraf was one of the most belligerent and undoubtedly funniest men in Nuseirat refugee camp. His presence brought a sense of energy, his gags a much-needed burst of laughter, that would bestow on his friends a sense of relief that they are still human in such an inhuman existence. He had a unique ability to scoff at adversity and deal with his plight head-on and with an amazing sense of hilarity.

But somehow the stress of camp life paid a heavy toll on Abu Ashraf's heart. After a visit to a local clinic, Abu Ashraf was referred to a well-known and respected cardiologist in Cairo. His wife and he traveled to the booming city with much of their life's savings, where he received a grim prognosis. The doctor told him that if he spent the total amount of his savings on surgery and later therapy, his chances of survival were about fifty-fifty.

Abu Ashraf weighed his odds. For him, the risk wasn't worth the money. Abu Ashraf and his wife left the doctor's office and checked into the best hotel in

town. They spent two weeks having the time of their lives, attending concerts, having late-night walks and eating in wonderful restaurants. When their money was gone, they returned home with lovely memories of a short holiday away from the rigors of occupation. Abu Ashraf was dead within a month.

My father often expressed that there was an untold and ironic wisdom in Abu Ashraf's decision to "go out with a bang." The notion became a serious consideration for him as well. But in November 2005, it looked as if Mohammed would be granted some freedom of movement, courtesy of a Gaza border agreement brokered by the then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and hailed as a "breakthrough" that would "give the Palestinian people freedom to move, to trade, to live ordinary lives."[42] According to the agreement, Palestinians were meant to administer the Palestinian side of the border, together with EU monitors using video surveillance technology that was also accessible by Israel. The "freedom" granted by the Rafah border arrangements were as unconvincing as the "freedom" yielded by the Israeli disengagement. They were both half-hearted maneuvers that gave a semblance of successive achievement, essentially granting nothing:

> The Agreement on Movement and Access, signed … after the Israeli disengagement from Gaza, was meant to facilitate the movement of Palestinians and goods in and out of Gaza. It also promised Palestinian control over the Rafah crossing into Egypt by November 2006, after a transitional year of EU monitoring and Israeli video surveillance. But according to the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Palestinians are worse off than they were a year ago, in terms of their freedom of movement and their overall economic situation … The UN report accuses Israel of violating every provision of the borders agreement to which it signed up, including the operation of the Rafah crossing.[43]

Mohammed, however, was one of the lucky ones who managed to breathe the air of freedom, even if temporarily. After filling in various applications, and after making many visits to PA offices, and waiting in endless lines, Mohammed managed to cross to Egypt. He was granted a rare moment of freedom that took him back to the days of his youth. Sinai was a place that Mohammed had often passed through, as a rebellious boy, a struggling laborer, a falafel maker, a defeated soldier, a widower mourning the death of his beloved wife, and now, an ill man from Gaza seeking respite and a fleeting moment of peace, enough to assure him of his humanity, and to remind him that there is a world beyond the confining walls, the minefields and barbed wire of Gaza.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

The fact that Gazans were able to move, relatively freely, within the Strip was overshadowed by Israel's loud and often deadly reminders of its military superiority over the largely imprisoned population. But Sharon's

"disengagement," as insubstantial as it was for ordinary Gazans, proved a career-changing move for Sharon, who, in November 2005, abandoned the Likud Party, which he helped create some 30 years earlier, in favor of a new party, Kadima. The political shifts in Israel further contributed to Sharon's new status as a "man of peace,"[44] a term earlier bestowed on him by President Bush. Sharon's moves were understood as part of the man's "slow metamorphosis from hawk to moderate." A news reporter readily referred to the Israeli leader and other Likud defectors as "the more progressive members" of the right-wing party.[45] Gazans, and Palestinians at large, could hardly relate to Sharon in similar ways. The man—who had changed Gaza's physical landscape in past years and cost the Strip hundreds, if not thousands, of its finest children as well as contributing to the Strip's ongoing nightmare—was anything but a changed man.

Gazans also paid no heed to the hundreds of endearing commentaries, venerating news reports and glorifying television programs that appeared *en masse* in the wake of Sharon's debilitating stroke in January 2006. For many Gazans, Sharon's stroke was divine intervention. The man who had tormented Gaza for so many years was lying unconscious in an Israeli hospital. It is not a Gazan tradition to glean satisfaction from others' misery. But when they do, they often cite compelling reasons. Sharon's disregard for civilian lives since his early years as a fighter for the Jewish underground terrorist organization, the Haganah (1948–49) and his role as commander of an infamous army unit responsible for several massacres (most remembered is the brutal murder of scores of defenseless villagers in Qibya in 1953)[46] seemed in no way to irk those who glorified the Israeli general and his bloody legacy. But for those who were brutalized by Sharon's reign of terror, the painful memories of the past were ever present. Never was there a time when Sharon, somehow, somewhere, didn't contribute to the augmentation of Palestinian tragedies: his human rights violations throughout the 1950s and 1960s (including the murder of 270 Egyptian prisoners of war in 1956[47]); his massive assaults on Gaza in the late 1970s; his contemptible war crimes in Lebanon in the early 1980s, and more recently his deadly crackdown on the Second Intifada, the assassinations, the suffocating siege, the endless closures, and all the rest.

DELIBERATE CHAOS

But Gazans were quickly consumed with other urgent matters, primarily the political rift within Fatah, and the elections of January 2006. Arafat was obviously the glue that kept the movement from descending into chaos. He had perfected a system of political balances and factional compromises that kept all rivals at bay. His death, however, brought an end to his balancing act, and Fatah fell into chaos. His successor, Mahmoud Abbas, survived the first fallout with Fatah youth when he convinced Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti—who was sentenced in June, 2004 by an Israeli court to five life sentences for his role in the Intifada—to call off plans to compete in PA presidential elections. After a double scare, Barghouti conceded, leaving the stage for Abbas, who then

became the sole Fatah candidate. Hardly challenged, he swept up Palestinian votes. But the Fatah rift grew wider after Israel unilaterally "disengaged" from Gaza. Violence in Gaza and charges of corruption everywhere else motioned that a breakdown in the PLO's largest faction was becoming imminent.

The political plot thickened with the encroaching date of the parliamentary elections on January 25, 2006. Barghouti made the split in Fatah official when his supporters submitted a separate alternative list of candidates to contest the elections under a different party name: Al-Mustaqbal (the Future).[48] The move opened the doors wide for various dramatic possibilities and ignited fear that a split in Fatah would mean a possible Hamas victory.

Political uncertainty within Fatah expressed itself in violence and chaos in the Strip. Kidnappings became a disheartening testimony to how factionalism, corruption and lack of discipline can scar a national struggle that was meant to exemplify precisely the opposite. Although attempts to hijack and reduce the Palestinian struggle date back to its very early days, never before have these efforts succeeded in eclipsing Palestinian national priorities in their entirety, as was witnessed then.

But the timing of the Gaza turmoil was suspiciously impeccable. Israel had long argued that Palestinians are unruly and incapable of governing themselves, that its occupation was the best worst-case scenario considering Palestinian incompetence, that Israel cannot rely on Palestinian police to secure its borders, thus must take matters into its own hands. And so it did. Israel's designation of a "no-go" zone in Gaza—enforced by air strikes and artillery fire—seemed a rational conclusion to the security gap in Gaza; the zone's first victim, killed on December 31, 2005, drew little attention.

But even for some Palestinians—those who benefited from the status quo and wished not to see a fundamental shift in the balance of power within the Palestinian political milieu—chaos had its rewards. Genuine and transparent democracy naturally stands at odds with the interests of self-imposed elites, political and ideological profiteers, to be exact. Several rounds of Palestinian municipal elections had already proven that a serious political shake-up was forthcoming in the legislative elections, and that those who made millions while paying lip-service to Palestinian freedom, liberation and so forth, feared the possibility of answering to a truly representative parliament, one predicated on the role of law, not nepotism. By destabilizing Gaza through disaffected militant groups, influential members of the ruling elite were conveying an unmistakable message: if democracy was to remove them from the political equation—with all of its perks and privileges—then militancy and disorder would allow them to remain in place.

As for the elections, most Palestinians didn't subscribe to the illusion that the process itself equated to any form of political independence. But there was an understanding, nonetheless, that Palestinian political and civil institutions required complete overhaul, an urgently needed shift as great as the growing threat presented by the Israeli occupation. The task was indeed daunting and the prospects were grim. If Fatah was re-elected, then no change was likely to follow. If a Hamas government was elected, then Israeli restriction

and a possible US-led boycott were likely to deny it the chance to reform the corrupt PA establishment.

"DECENT PEOPLE"

On January 25, Mohammed wore his finest outfit, brushed his hair with added care and walked through the streets of Nuseirat as if he was on a mission. In fact, he *was* on a mission, but he was not the only Gazan to feel that way. It was election day and Palestinians in Gaza, as in the rest of the Occupied Territories, were given the chance to elect their representatives. But this was not a typical democratic exercise. Never once since the initial signing of Oslo did Palestinians receive a meaningful and truly representative platform that allowed them to express their views of the entire political discourse following the famous handshake in 1993. Mohammed was not to miss this opportunity for the world. He made his intentions clear. He voted for Hamas. He felt that he needed to qualify his decision by asserting that he did not see eye-to-eye with the group ideologically, that in fact, he was a self-proclaimed communist for the greater part of his life. But he felt strongly that they deserved to lead the Palestinian struggle for freedom, not least because they were "decent people."

In fact, Mohammed's vote was not cast in vain. Hamas's spectacular victory in the elections gave rise to a new era of politics in Palestine, the Middle East and in the Arab and Muslim world as a whole. The implications of Hamas's sweeping win in Gaza and the rest of the Occupied Territories was not limited to the geopolitical boundaries of that area. Indeed, it went beyond such borders to include a region trapped in an outdated political process, neither meaningful, nor equitable.

All eyes were on Washington as the election results came out. European Union members were careful not to validate the victory of a "terrorist" group, and the Arab front was apprehensive and unusually quiet. Worried not to fundamentally expose Bush's Middle East democracy farce, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, among other US officials, attempted to articulate a response that both approved of Palestinian democracy, yet objected to its outcome. The US House of Representatives called on the administration to withhold aid from the new government.[49]

Hamas, unknowingly perhaps, abruptly deprived Washington of its last card in a Middle East foreign policy game, which was already in tatters. Delivering democracy was—until Hamas's political rise—Washington's strongest pretext, one that was used to justify its military presence in the Middle East. Prior to the Hamas victory, the Middle East democracy train seemed to be chugging along at a calculated speed with fantastic speeches and more or less favorable outcomes, from a US foreign policy perspective. But Palestinians, unexpectedly, changed the rules of the democracy game:

> The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections has given rise to much soul searching in Washington about who lost Palestine. Although the George W.

> Bush administration continues to defend its decision to "allow" elections to take place in Palestine, rather than acceding to Israeli demands to stop the process, a growing number of voices is joining a chorus of doubts about the U.S. policy of promoting democracy in the Middle East. Unfortunately, much of the discussion currently taking place is focusing on the wrong issue. The main problem is not U.S. policy but the underlying conditions in the last few months that have led to the victory of Hamas in Palestine. True, the Bush administration badly miscalculated the outcome when it launched a policy of democracy promotion in the region—meaning above all a headlong rush toward elections. But it is not U.S. democracy promotion that has made Islamist movements into major players in the Middle East. However, a wrong U.S. response to the victory of Hamas could easily radicalize even the more moderate Islamist organizations, which have evolved considerably recently. And it is definitely not in the U.S. interests to weaken the reformists within the Islamist movements.[50]

Who could have imagined that Mohammed's vote could mean all of this? As was expected, the democratically elected Palestinian government was quickly and officially isolated, thanks to the tireless efforts of Secretary Rice, urged on by the Israeli government. The new Palestinian government was met almost immediately with unreasonable demands: to unilaterally renounce violence, to unconditionally recognize Israel and to unreservedly adhere to past agreements signed between Israel and the PLO.[51] The Israeli government was not presented with any list of demands, similar or otherwise. The new Palestinian government rejected the US ultimatum of compliance or isolation; thus an international siege, with which even Arab states complied, commenced.

Mohammed was officially under siege in Gaza, with little food, little medicine and no freedom of movement outside of the Strip whatsoever.

13
Dying, Again

The siege on Gaza followed Hamas's victory in the elections of January 25, 2006. On March 18, Israel, the US and European countries began a boycott campaign, supposedly aimed at isolating the elected Hamas government.[1] Denial of all funding to an administration that relied mostly on foreign aid naturally led to the immense suffering of the civilian population of Gaza. Israel withheld tax revenue that was collected on behalf of the government, and tightened its military presence at the border.[2] Arab financial institutions were called upon to follow suit, and to boycott official Palestinian institutions. The Arabs obliged.[3] All efforts at finding a unity government—that would bring together Hamas, Fatah and others—were thwarted, either by Israel, or by certain factions within the once-ruling Fatah.

The situation in Gaza progressed from bad to worse, as predictable factional violence built up, culminating on June 14, 2007 in an all-out clash between Hamas and Fatah,[4] the latter being politically, financially and military backed by the US, Israel and a few Arab regimes.[5] Fatah's forces were routed on June 15 in one of the most bitter events in Palestinian history, especially that of Gaza itself.[6]

The June violence was the required event to justify complete closure of Gaza, as the world watched the small Strip reeling under a most inhumane siege, frantically trying to survive. Many Gazans died due to lack of proper medical care.[7] One-and-a-half million people existed as a human experiment, awaiting the verdict of the "international community" on their freedom, the right to eat proper food, drink clean water and receive even the most basic medical care. Meanwhile, the imprisoned population was still subjected to Israeli military aggression, but Hamas's coming to power enhanced Israel's cruel treatment considerably. In the first half of 2007, an average of 17 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli army every month in the Strip. Following Hamas's ascendancy in Gaza, between July 2007 and June 2008, 49 Palestinians were killed every month, especially after September 2007, when Israel declared Gaza a "hostile entity."[8]

It was not that Gaza had never experienced life under Israeli siege. But this time, the blockade was worse than ever before, and Israel was cheered on by many parties, including Europeans, Arabs and even some Palestinians. All the masks had fallen away and tiny, impoverished Gaza stood alone in defiance of those who broke the very humanitarian laws they themselves had designed. Gaza brought an end to many illusions—that of a tailored "democracy," lopsided international law, Arab "brotherhood," among other tall tales.

Mohammed too stood alone, knowing, perhaps, that this living nightmare might be coming to an end. When Israel bombed Gaza's only power plant, on June 28, 2006 (which coincidently was based in Nuseirat),[9] Mohammed lost some of the few tools that gave him relief or momentary joy: his radio, his fan, and his oxygen pump. The plight of the camp worsened when an Israeli jet blew up a bridge that supported the main water line, thus denying Nuseirat access to drinking water.[10] Then Israel decreased, and eventually, completely stopped all fuel shipments to isolated Gaza. It even blocked foreign journalists from reaching the devastated Strip to report on the collective torment, which grew to unprecedented levels.[11] At the age of 70, Mohammed roamed the streets of Gaza, looking for a pharmacy, a clinic, any place that provided some respite for his asthma. But there was none. Pharmacies were empty, save the meager provisions that were smuggled through the tunnels which Gazans dug beneath the earth, extending from Rafah to Egypt.[12] What was available was rare and extremely expensive. Mohammed sought little in his remaining days, but a moment of relief, a breath of air.

Gaza's, and Mohammed's, isolation was complete: Mohammed's sons could no longer send him money, as the boycott extended to reach all financial institutions as well. Desperate, he sold his house, the last tangible connection he had to his beloved Zarefah. That beautiful and battered place that had stood the test of time and bullets was sold for scarce medicine, smuggled through Gaza's tunnels, on which Mohammed depended to breathe. Mohammed couldn't have imagined the day that he would have to bring Zarefah's photo down from its rusty nail on the living-room wall. He left the house and rented a tiny apartment on the outskirts of Nuseirat. As the Hamas government battled to maintain control and order, the US insisted on Israel's right to defend itself; as the Arabs stayed silent, as the world watched, as Gazans fell in droves, Mohammed filled a few boxes with his remaining possessions and left.

"Son, I am dying," he softly mumbled on the phone.

"I am sorry, Dad. I am so sorry. I wish I could be there with you. I wish I could do something. I wish it was me, and not you, Dad."

"Son, I love you. May Allah bless you and your children."

Mohammed was incapacitated for a few weeks. There wasn't a hospital bed to be found in Gaza, for nearly all the hospitals were converted to function as massive emergency wards. His neighbors and friends in Gaza took care of him and desperately tried to persuade the Israelis to grant him a permit to enter the West Bank for treatment, or at least to die in the company of his sons. Alas, it was determined that it was too great a risk for the security and the well-being of the State of Israel; he was sentenced to die at home with no treatment.

In the last few days of his life, he would make an occasional groan, an unexpected cry: "I am in pain." There was little to be done.

The last time I spoke with him, I asked a neighbor to hold the handset to his ear, so that I could talk to him, although he was unconscious.

"Dad, I know you cannot speak, but I am sure you can hear me. I just want to tell you thank you very much for all that you have done for us. Although

you haven't seen my children, they know you very well. I have spent so many hours telling them stories about you, your antics, and what a wonderful father you have been. Zarefah, your granddaughter, loves you and sends her kisses and hugs; so do Iman and Sammy. Sammy is only two, but it is likely that he will grow up to be a trouble-maker. Iman has a heart of gold, just like you, and Zarefah looks just like mom. Isn't that marvelous?"

"I told them so much about you, about Beit Daras, your falafel business and about my mother. I also told them that 'Grandpa Mohammed is a freedom fighter.' They are so proud of you, and proud to be your grandkids."

A few hours later, I called, and spoke with a neighbor. His extra-kind voice and the sound of women crying in the background was enough to let me know that my father had died.

Thousands of people descended to his funeral from throughout Gaza; oppressed people, who shared his plight, hopes and struggles, accompanied him to the graveyard where he was laid to rest. He didn't even have the money to buy his own coffin. I have often thought it to be a great mercy that Palestinians must only endure Israel's occupation for one lifetime. The resilient fighter had finished the battle for a well-deserved moment of peace.

JUST A DREAM

The night my father died, I had a dream.

There we both were, sitting face to face, in the middle of one of our family's fields in Beit Daras. We were sitting in the glory of what once was ours. I was a young man; my father was wrinkled and withered. His battle scars were clearly visible; his breathing labored. He looked to me and said, "I'm going to die again tonight."

A dream so vivid: it was springtime, a warm and peaceful afternoon. The trees were in bloom; the wind carried the perfume of the almond, lemon and orange blossoms. Farmers were busy in their fields, children lying flat on their backs, basking in the afternoon sun, without shoes, without a care in the world. I felt a sense of belonging that I have never felt in my life, and I remember thinking to myself, " … so this is what it feels like to be home." It was as if the dream was meant to give me just a short glimpse of the beauty and purity of those lovely years before the soldiers came. Until that moment, I don't think I was ever able to fully comprehend the overflowing love my father had for his homeland, for his freedom, and with that came an understanding of the incomprehensible sense of loss with the Catastrophe. The sun poured its light on us. Then I shifted my attention from my father's tired eyes to the menacing band of soldiers on the horizon, from whence our nightmare started.

And once more, he caught my gaze and said, "I'm going to die again tonight."

Notes

1 HAPPIER TIMES

1. Mostafa Murad al-Dabagh, *Biladuna Filistin* (Kufr Qari: Dar al-Huda for Publishing and Distribution, 2002), p. 11.
2. Interview with the author, July 7, 2008.
3. Ibid.
4. Abdallah Tayeh, *Moon in Beit Daras* (Gaza: The Palestinian Writers Union and UNDP, 2001), p. 234.
5. Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876–1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1984), pp. 30–31.
6. Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948,* Arabic edn. (Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1997), p. 522.
7. Tayeh, *Moon in Beit Daras*, pp. 10-11.
8. Al-Dabagh, *Biladuna Filistin,* p. 209.
9. Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, pp. 33–5.
10. Mideast Web Historical Documents, "Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, 28 June 1919," <http://www.mideastweb.org/leaguemand.htm> (date last accessed, April 21, 2009).
11. BBC News, "The Sykes-Picot Agreement," (November 29, 2001), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/middle_east/2001/israel_and_the_palestinians/key_documents/1681362.stm> (date last accessed, April 21, 2009).
12. Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, pp. 33–5.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 83.

2 BORN INTO TURMOIL

1. Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora, A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876–1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1984), p. 189.
2. Edward Said, "Truth and Reconciliation," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (January 14–20, 1999), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/412/op2.htm> (date last accessed, April 23, 2009).
3. Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, pp. 189–90.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Mideast Web Historical Documents, "The Peel Commission Partition Plans, 1938," <http://www.mideastweb.org/peelmaps.htm> (date last accessed, April 23, 2009).
7. Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, pp. 189–90.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, "The British White Paper of 1939" <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/brwh1939.asp> (date last accessed, April 23, 2009).
11. Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Random House Inc., 1980), p. 17.
12. Ibid., pp. 99–100.
13. Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, pp. 190–91.
14. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "David Ben-Gurion 1886–1973," <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/State/David+Ben-Gurion.htm> (date last accessed, April 23, 2009).

15. Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, pp. 235–6.
16. Peter L. Hahn, "Review of David Ben-Gurion and the American Alignment for a Jewish State, by Allan Gal and David S. Segal," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (October 1993), pp. 13–48.
17. Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, pp. 236–8.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.

3 TAKING FLIGHT

1. *Carta's Official Guide to Israel* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Defence Publishing House, Carta, the Israel Map and publishing Company Ltd, 1993, 3rd edn), p. 100.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid
6. Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2006), p. 30.
7. Ibid., p. 29.
8. Ibid.
9. Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876–1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1984), p. 305.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 306.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, p. 40.
17. Aref el Aref, *Al Nakba 1947–1955* (Beirut: Al Maktaba Al Asriya, 1958) Vol. 3, pp. 534–6.
18. Ibid.
19. Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Arabic edn (Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1997), p. 8.
20. Interview with Ni'ima Yazouri in Rafah, the Gaza Strip. Conducted by Tom Hayes and translated from Arabic by Afif Arabi, Kamal Abu Shampsia and Majdi Amari.
21. Gershon Rivlin and Elhanan Orren (eds), *Ben-Gurion: War Diaries, 1947–1949* (Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1993), p. 125.
22. Interview with the author, July 7, 2008.
23. Interview with Ni'ima Yazouri in Rafah, the Gaza Strip.
24. El Aref, *Al Nakba 1947–1955*, p. 535.
25. Ibid.
26. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 126–7.
27. Rivlin, *Ben-Gurion: War Diaries, 1947–1949*, p. 316.
28. Yusef Hijazi, "The Zionist Holocaust: Massacre of Beit Daras," <http://www.latef.net/algorbal/news.php?maa=View&id=1475> (date last accessed, April 25, 2009).
29. Interview with the author, July 7, 2008.
30. Interview with Ni'ima Yazouri in Rafah, the Gaza Strip.
31. Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, p. 310.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Khalidi, *All That Remains*, p. 9.
36. Abdallah Tayeh, *Moon in Beit Daras* (Gaza: The Palestinian Writers Union and UNDP, 2001), p. 236.

4 A WORLD OUTSIDE THE TENT

1. Gerald Butt, *Life at the Crossroads: A History of Gaza* (Nicosia: Rimal Publications, 1995), p. 138.
2. Ibid., p. 139.
3. Gloria Emerson, *Gaza – A Year in the Intifada: A Personal Account from an Occupied Land* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991), p. xv.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. xvi.
7. Ibid., p. 142.
8. Ibid., p. 149.
9. Ibid.

5 LOST AND FOUND

1. Hussein Abu Al-Namel, *Gaza Strip, 1948–1967: Economic, Political, Sociological and Military Development* (Beirut: Palestine Research Centre, 1979), p. 148.
2. Saeb Shaat, "Gaza: Long History of Wars and Defiance," *Arab News* (February 16, 2008), <http://www.arabnews.com/?page=9&section=0&article=106832&d=17&m=2&y=2008> (date last accessed April 28, 2009).
3. Gerald Butt, *Life at the Crossroads: A History of Gaza* (Nicosia: Rimal Publications, 1995), pp. 149–50.
4. Selwyn Ilan Troen and Moshe Shemesh, *The Suez-Sinai Crisis, 1956* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 87–8.

6 ZAREFAH

1. Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 1.
2. Ibid., p. 2.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 7.
5. James P. Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), pp. 45–8.
6. Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, p. 9.
7. Hussein Abu Al-Namel, *Gaza Strip, 1948–1967: Economic, Political, Sociological and Military Development* (Beirut: Palestine Research Centre, 1979), pp. 181–2.
8. Ibid., p. 221.
9. Ibid., p. 222.
10. Gerald Butt, *Life at the Crossroads: A History of Gaza* (Nicosia: Rimal Publications, 1995), p. 152.
11. See "The Original Palestine National Charter," <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/cove1.html> (date last accessed, May 1, 2009). Also see "Palestine Liberation Organization," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine_Liberation_Organization> (date last accessed, May 1, 2009). For more information see Samih K. Farsoun, *Palestine and the Palestinians: A Social and Political History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006), pp. 203–205.
12. See Sari Nusseibeh, *Once Upon a Country: a Palestinian Life* (New York: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 91–2. Also see "Ahmad Shukeiri," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Shukeiri> (date last accessed, May 1, 2009).
13. Butt, *Life at the Crossroads*, pp. 153–4.
14. International Development Research Center, "Timeline," <http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-135054-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html> (date last accessed, May 1, 2009).

15. Abu Al-Namel, *Gaza Strip*, p. 239.
16. Ibid., pp. 235–6.
17. Butt, *Life at the Crossroads*, p. 154.
18. Ibid., p. 155.

7 AL-NAKSA: THE SETBACK

1. Ritchie Ovendale, *The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Wars* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1984), p. 177.
2. Ibid., p. 180.
3. Martin Wright, ed., *Israel and the Palestinians: Countries in Crisis* (Chicago, IL: St James Press, 1989), p. 28.
4. Ibid.
5. Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2000), p. 29.
6. Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 29.
7. Ibid.
8. Wright, *Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 28.
9. Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 28.
10. James Ciment, *Palestine/Israel: The Long Conflict* (New York: Fact On File, Inc, 1997), p. 46.
11. Ibid., p. 45.
12. Ibid., p. 40.
13. Anat N. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence: The Institutionalization of a Popular Struggle* (Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, and Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2005), p. 33.
14. Ziad Abu-Amr, *The Roots of the Political Movements in the Gaza Strip, 1967–1948* (Jerusalem: Dar al-Aswar, 1987), pp. 85–6.
15. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, pp. 29–30.
16. Ibid., p. 30.
17. Ciment, *Palestine/Israel*, p. 41.
18. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 38.
19. Ibid., p. 47.
20. Ibid., p. 48.
21. Wright, *Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 29.
22. Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 253.
23. Jihad Shaban al-Batch, *The Zionist Settlement in Gaza* (Gaza: Maktabat al-Yaziji, 2003), pp. 45–8.
24. Yael Epstein, "The Palestinian Labor Market in Israel: Between Globalization and Intifada," *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 4, and Vol. 9, No. 1 (2001–02).
25. Ciment, *Palestine/Israel*, p. 48.
26. Mohammed Khaled al-Az'ar, *The Resistance in the Gaza Strip, 1967–1985* (Gaza: The PLO High Council for Culture and Science, 1987), p. 74.
27. Ibid., p. 75.
28. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 60.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 61.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Phil Reeves, "Sharon's Return Puts Wreckage Street in Fear," *The Independent* (January 21, 2001), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/sharons-return-puts-wreckage-street-in-fear-703218.html> (date last accessed, May 4, 2009).
34. Ibid.

8 AN OLIVE BRANCH AND A THOUSAND CANS OF TOMATO SAUCE

1. Noam Chomsky, *Towards a New Cold War: US Foreign Policy from Vietnam to Regan* (New York: The New Press, 2003), p. 293.
2. Martin Wright, ed., *Israel and the Palestinians: Countries in Crisis* (Chicago, IL: St James Press, 1989), p. 29.
3. James Ciment, *Palestine/Israel: The Long Conflict* (New York: Fact On File, Inc, 1997), p. 46.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 47.
6. Gershom Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006), p. 165.
7. Ibid., p. 222.
8. Ibid., p. 224.
9. Ibid.
10. Ciment, *Palestine/Israel*, p. 75.
11. Anat N. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence: The Institutionalization of a Popular Struggle* (Brighton; Portland: Sussex Academic Press, and Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2005), p. 76.
12. Wright, *Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 30.
13. United Nations Treaty Collection, <http://untreaty.un.org/unts/1_60000/23/7/00044350.pdf> (date last accessed, May 5, 2009).
14. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 77.
15. Ritchie Ovendale, *The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Wars* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1984), p. 192.
16. Ibid.
17. Wright, *Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 31.
18. Ciment, *Palestine/Israel*, p. 76.
19. Noam Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), p. 65.
20. "Life on the Bar-Lev Line," *Time* (June 22, 1970), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,944086,00.html> (date last accessed, May 4, 2009).
21. Richard Bordeaux Parker, *The October War: A Retrospective* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), p. 349.
22. Maria do Céu Pinto, *Political Islam and the United States: A Study of U.S. Policy Towards Islamist Movements in the Middle East* (Berkshire, UK: Garnet & Ithaca Press, 1999), p. 69.
23. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 73.
24. As'ad Ghanem, *The Palestinian Regime: A "Partial Democracy"* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), p. 16.
25. Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents* (New York: Macmillan, 2006), pp. 348–51.
26. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 30.
27. John C. Rolland, *Lebanon: Current Issues and Background* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Publishers, 2003), p. 65.
28. Ciment, *Palestine/Israel*, p. 81.
29. "Tel al-Zaatar Massacre," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tel_al-Zaatar_massacre> (date last accessed, May 4, 2008). Also see Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Nation Books, 2002), pp. 50–51, 78–9, 85–6, 98–102, 324.
30. See Ang Swee Chai, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: The Other Press, 2002).

9 STRANGE MEN AT THE BEACH CASINO

1. Abdallah Frangi, *The PLO and Palestine* (London: Zed Books, 1983), p. 185.
2. Ibid., pp. 183–5.

3. Mark A. Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 490.
4. Frangi, *The PLO and Palestine*, p. 185.
5. Ibid.
6. Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 196.
7. Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 77.
8. Elmer Berger, *Peace for Palestine: First Lost Opportunity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), p. 27.
9. Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 354.
10. Ibid., pp. 354–5.
11. James Ciment, *Palestine/Israel: The Long Conflict* (New York: Fact On File, Inc, 1997), p. 50.
12. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz, *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2007), p. 366.
13. See the official website of Pat Robertson, "Biblical Prophecy Fulfilled?," <http://www.patrobertson.com/Teaching/patprophecy.asp> (date last accessed, May 5, 2009).
14. Tore Frängsmyr and Irwin Abrams, *Peace 1971–1980: Including Presentation and Acceptance Speeches and Laureates' Biographies* (Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 1997), p. 203.
15. Ibid., p. 204.
16. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 369.
17. Ibid., p. 356.
18. Frangi, *The PLO and Palestine*, p. 187.
19. Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 175.
20. Frangi, *The PLO and Palestine*, p. 187.
21. Ibid.
22. Gerald Butt, *Life at the Crossroads: A History of Gaza* (Nicosia: Rimal Publications, 1995), pp. 162–3.
23. Ann Mosely Lesch and Mark Tessler, *Israel, Egypt and the Palestinians: From Camp David to Intifada* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 265.
24. Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2000), p. 30.
25. Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 15.
26. Hroub, *Hamas*, p. 31.
27. Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, p. 15.
28. Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), p. 19.
29. Ibid., p. 20.
30. Hroub, *Hamas*, pp. 33–4.
31. Ibid., p. 31.
32. Ibid.
33. Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, p. 14.

10 INTIFADA: ... AND ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE

1. Martin Wright, ed., *Israel and the Palestinians: Countries in Crisis* (Chicago, IL: St James Press, 1989), p. 59.
2. Gershom Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006), p. 369.
3. Edgar O'Balance, *The Palestinian Intifada* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 19–20.

4. Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire*, p. 369.
5. Gerald Butt, *Life at the Crossroads: A History of Gaza* (Nicosia: Rimal Publications, 1995), p. 167.
6. Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), pp. 24–5.
7. Ibid., p. 24.
8. O'Balance, *The Palestinian Intifada*, p. 26.
9. Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, p. 24.
10. Anat N. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence: The Institutionalization of a Popular Struggle* (Brighton; Portland: Sussex Academic Press, and Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2005), p. 116.
11. Butt, *Life at the Crossroads*, pp. 169–70.
12. Ibid., pp. 172–3.
13. Ibid., p. 173.
14. O'Balance, *The Palestinian Intifada*, p. 33.
15. Butt, *Life at the Crossroads*, p. 173.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., pp. 173–4.
18. Chehab, *Inside Hamas,* p. 25.
19. Ibid., pp. 25–7.
20. Shaul Mishal and Reuben Aharoni, *Speaking Stones: Communiqués from the Intifada Underground* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), p. 201.
21. Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, p. 31.
22. Ibid., p. 33.
23. O'Balance, *The Palestinian Intifada*, p. 20.
24. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, pp. 117–18.
25. Mishal and Aharoni, *Speaking Stones*, p. 53.
26. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 118.
27. Roni C. Rabin, "Israeli TV's Editing Brings Harsh Questions," *New York Times* (March 30, 1988), <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DEED61538F930A35750C0A96E948260&n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/Subjects/P/Palestinians> (date last accessed, May 8, 2009).
28. Adel Safty, *From Camp David to the Gulf: Negotiations, Language & Propaganda, and War* (Montréal: Black Rose Books Ltd, 1992), p. 26.
29. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 122.
30. Al-Bab, "Arafat at the UN General Assembly: Yasser Arafat's Speech to the UN General Assembly, 13 December 1988," *al-bab.com*, <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/pal/pal5.htm> (date last accessed, May 8, 2009).
31. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 122.
32. Ibid., p. 123.
33. O'Balance, *The Palestinian Intifada*, p. 64.
34. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 125.
35. Ibid., p. 127.
36. O'Balance, *The Palestinian Intifada*, p. 46.
37. Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, p. 34.
38. Ibid., p. 35.
39. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, p. 129.
40. Ibid.
41. "An Historical Speech: Dr. Abdel Shafi at the Opening of the Madrid Conference in 1991," *The Palestine Monitor*, <http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article139> (date last accessed, May 8, 2009).
42. Laetitia Bucaille, *Growing Up Palestinian: Israeli Occupation and the Intifada Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 25.
43. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence*, pp. 132–3.

11 OSLO ON THE LINE

1. Chris McGreal, "Camp swelters with little power or water," *The Guardian* (July 3, 2006) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/jul/03/israel> (date last accessed, May 9, 2009).
2. N. Kurz, *Fatah and the Politics of Violence: The Institutionalization of a Popular Struggle* (Brighton; Portland: Sussex Academic Press, and Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2005), p. 135.
3. George Giacaman and Dag Jorund Lonning, eds, *After Oslo: New Realities, Old Problems* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 1.
4. George Headlam, *Yasser Arafat* (Breckenridge, CO: Twenty-First Century Books, 2003), p. 95.
5. Butt, *Life at the Crossroads*, p. 179.
6. Ibid., p. 182.
7. Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), p. 172.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Greg Myre, "In Gaza, a Cautious Crackdown on Corruption," *International Herald Tribune* (March 10, 2006), <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/03/09/news/gaza.php> (date last accessed, May 9, 2009).
12. See The Palestinian Human Rights Group, "The Chaos of the Corruption," *phrmg.org*, <http://www.phrmg.org/Corruption%20in%20the%20Palestinian%20Authority.htm> (date last accessed, May 9, 2009).
13. Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), p. 105.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Giacaman and Lonning, *After Oslo*, p. 173.
17. Gershom Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006), p. 371.
18. Dilip Hiro, *The Essential Middle East: A Comprehensive Guide* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), p. 418.
19. Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire*, p. 370.
20. See Charles Richards, "The Hebron Massacre: Brutal Birth Pangs of a Nation," *The Independent* (February 26, 1994), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/the-hebron-massacre-brutal-birth-pangs-of-a-nation-1396634.html> (date last accessed, May 9, 2009).
21. Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, p. 106.
22. Rubenberg, *The Palestinians*, pp. 70–71.
23. Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 98.
24. Ibid., p. 99.
25. Ibid., p. 100.
26. James Ciment, *Palestine/Israel: The Long Conflict* (New York: Fact On File, Inc, 1997), p. 219.
27. Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire,* pp. 371–2.
28. See "The Wye River Memorandum," *State Department*, <http://www.state.gov/www/regions/nea/981023_interim_agmt.html> (date last accessed, May 9, 2009).
29. Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians*, p. 101.
30. Ibid., p. 103.
31. Ibid., p. 104.
32. Ephraim Kahana, *Historical Dictionary of Israeli Intelligence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 2–3.

33. Anthony H. Cordesman and Jennifer Moravitz, *The Israeli-Palestinian War: Escalating to Nowhere* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), pp. 8–9.
34. See "Barak's Victory Speech," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/346507.stm> (date last accessed May 9, 2009).
35. Edgar O'Balance, *The Palestinian Intifada* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc, 1998), p. 185.
36. Ibid.

12 THE WORLD AS SEEN FROM THE STONE STAIRCASE

1. Greg Philo and Mike Berry, *Bad News from Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 83.
2. "Interview with Hagit Ofran, New Settlement Watch Director," *Settlements in Focus*, Vol. 3, No. 2, <http://www.peacenow.org/policy.asp?rid=&cid=3996> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
3. Philo and Berry, *Bad News from Israel*, pp. 86–7.
4. Michael Bothe and Boris Kondoch, *International Peacekeeping: The Yearbook of International Peace Operations* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2002), pp. C9–C10.
5. Philo and Berry, *Bad News from Israel*, p. 87.
6. "Profile: Ariel Sharon," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1154622.stm> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
7. Philo and Berry, *Bad News from Israel*, p. 88.
8. "Israel Reoccupies Most of West Bank," *BBC News* (April 4, 2002), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1910086.stm> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
9. "Intifada – Special Coverage," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/archives/intifada/coverage.htm> (last accessed, May 10, 2009). Also see Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), p. 569.
10. James Brooks, "Dispersing Demonstrations–Or Chemical Warfare?," *Electronic Intifada* (July 12, 2004), <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article2900.shtml> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
11. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, "Weekly Report on Israeli Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories," (February 8–14, 2001), <http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/W_report/English/15-02-2001.htm> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
12. "Tanks Attack Palestinian Refugee Site," *The Guardian* (April 11, 2001), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/apr/11/israel> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
13. Ibid.
14. Philo and Berry, *Bad News from Israel*, p. 89.
15. Dilip Hiro, *The Essential Middle East: a Comprehensive Guide* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), p. 234.
16. Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights, "The Israeli Apartheid Wall: A New Element of Occupation and Dispossession," <http://www.auphr.org/thewall> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
17. Philo and Berry, *Bad News from Israel,* pp. 89–90.
18. Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), p. 120.
19. Ibid., p. 126.
20. "UN Warns of 'Growing Gaza Crisis,'" *BBC News* (October 7, 2004), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3723850.stm> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
21. "Israeli Raid on Northern Gaza (28 September–15 October 2004)," *Electronic Intifada*, <http://electronicintifada.net/bytopic/300.shtml> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
22. "UN Warns of 'Growing Gaza Crisis,'" *BBC News*.
23. Ibid.

24. B'Tselem, "Statistics: Fatalities," <http://www.btselem.org/english/Statistics> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
25. Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," *New York Review of Books,* Vol. 48, No. 5 (August 9, 2001), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/14380> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
26. Sylvain Cypel, *Walled: Israeli Society at an Impasse* (New York: Other Press, 2007), pp. 274–5.
27. Gwynne Dyer, *With Every Mistake* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2006), p. 342.
28. "Arafat's Death: Global Reaction in Quotes," *BBC News* (November 11, 2004), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4001697.stm> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
29. Ibid.
30. Council on Foreign Relations, "Middle East: The Road Map to Peace" (February 7, 2005), <http://www.cfr.org/publication/7738> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
31. Michael Tracy Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: The Power and Limits of Beliefs* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 190.
32. "Israeli Cabinet Statement on Road Map and 14 Reservations," Jewish Virtual Library (May 25, 2003), <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/road1.html> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
33. Ivo Aertsen et al., *Restoring Justice after Large-scale Violent Conflicts: Kosovo, DR Congo and the Israeli-Palestinian Case* (Devon, UK: Willan Publishing, 2008), p. 385.
34. Esther Pan, "Hamas' Role in the Palestinian Elections," Council on Foreign Relations (December 30, 2005), <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9485/hamas_role_in_the_palestinian_elections.html> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
35. "Beach Strike Shakes Hamas Cease-fire," *CNN* (June 9, 2006), <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/06/09/mideast> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
36. "Israeli vs. Israeli in Gaza," *Christian Science Monitor* (June 20, 2005), <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0721/p06s01-wome.html> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
37. Uri Avnery, "Arik's Horror Show," Jews for a Just Peace (July 2, 2005), <http://www.jewsforajustpeace.com/pages/horror.html> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
38. Interview with the author, April 12, 2009.
39. See B'Tselem, "The Gaza Strip after Disengagement," <http://www.btselem.org/English/Gaza_Strip> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
40. "Outgoing Amb. to Israel Vows U.S. Support for West Bank Settlements," *Fox News* (September 18, 2005), <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,169710,00.html> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
41. Scott Shiloh, "Uzi Dayan: Israel Must Destroy Another 32 Towns," *Israeli National News* (September 20, 2005), <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/90175> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
42. Laila El-Haddad, "UN: Israel Breaks Border Agreement," *Aljazeera.net* (December 1, 2006), <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2006/11/200852513193241575.html> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
43. Ibid.
44. Tanya Reinhart, *The Road Map to Nowhere: Israel/Palestine Since 2003* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 31.
45. Alison Caldwell, "Sharon Quits Likud," *ABC Online* (November 22, 2005), <http://www.abc.net.au/cgi-bin/common/printfriendly.pl?http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2005/s1513209.htm> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
46. Noam Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), pp. 283–5.
47. Electronic Intifada, "Ariel Sharon: Prime Minister of Israel," <http://electronicintifada.net/forreference/keyfigures/sharon.html> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
48. "Fatah Split Before Key Elections," *BBC News* (December 15, 2005), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4530206.stm> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
49. "US House of Representatives Approves Resolution on Hamas," *VOA* (February 16, 2006), <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2006-02/2006-02-16-voa4.cfm?CFID=168036

555&CFTOKEN=10828418&jsessionid=de30aa34835502ad765d607b14634c501a58> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
50. Marina Ottaway, "Promoting Democracy after Hamas' Victory," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (February 30, 2006), <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=17978&prog=zgp&proj=zdrl,zme> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).
51. "Hamas Rejects 'Unfair' Aid Demand," *BBC News* (January 31, 2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4664152.stm> (date last accessed, May 10, 2009).

13 DYING, AGAIN

1. Rory McCarthy, "EU Refuses to Lift Boycott of Palestinian Government," *The Guardian* (April 27, 2007), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/apr/27/israel.eu> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).
2. "Israel to Impose Hamas Sanctions," *BBC News* (February 19, 2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4729000.stm> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).
3. Erica Silverman, "Government Non Grata," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (May 4–10, 2006), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/793/re1.htm> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).
4. Steven Erlanger, "Hamas Seizes Broad Control in Gaza Strip," *New York Times* (June 14, 2009), <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/14/world/middleeast/14mideast.html> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).
5. Mohammed Assadi, "U.S. Plans to Expand Program for Abbas's Forces," *Reuters* (April 27, 2009), <http://www.reuters.com/article/vcElection08/idUSTRE53Q5ZD20090427> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).
6. Erlanger, "Hamas Seizes Broad Control in Gaza Strip."
7. Ghassan Bannoura, "163 Patients Die Due to the 11 Months Israeli Siege on Gaza," International Middle East Media Center (May 26, 2009), <http://www.imemc.org/article/55066> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).
8. "The June 2008 Gaza Ceasefire," Carter Center, <http://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/Gaza_movement_and_fatalities_report%20FINAL%201%2022%2009.pdf> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).
9. Chris McGreal, "Camp Swelters with Little Power or Water," *The Guardian* (July 3, 2009), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/jul/03/israel> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).
10. Ibid.
11. Aleem Maqbool, "Gaza Shut to Fuel and Journalists," *BBC News* (November 10, 2008), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7719880.stm> (date last updated, May 15, 2009).
12. Jeremy Young, "Reporter's Diary: Gaza's Tunnels," *Aljazeera.net* (January 27, 2009), <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/01/200912619235718658 9.html> (date last accessed, May 15, 2009).

Selected Bibliography

Abu Al-Namel, 1979. *Gaza Strip, 1948–1967: Economic, Political, Sociological and Military Development*. Beirut: Palestine Research Centre.

Abu-Amr, Ziad, 1987. *The Roots of the Political Movements in the Gaza Strip, 1948–1967*. Jerusalem: Dar al-Aswar.

——, 1994. *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Al-Dabagh, Mostafa Murad, 2002. *Biladuna Filistin*. Kufr Qari: Dar al-Huda for Publishing and Distribution.

Butt, Gerald, 1995. *Life at the Crossroads: A History of Gaza*. Nicosia: Rimal Publications.

Chai, Ang Swee, 2002. *From Beirut to Jerusalem*. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: The Other Press.

Chehab, Zaki, 2007. *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement*. New York: Nation Books.

Chomsky, Noam, 1999. *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

——, 2002. *Pirates and Emperors Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

——, 2003. *Towards a New Cold War: US Foreign Policy from Vietnam to Regan*. New York: The New Press.

Ciment, James, 1997. *Palestine/Israel: The Long Conflict*. New York: Fact On File, Inc.

Cobban, Helena, 1984. *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power, and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cypel, Sylvain, 2007. *Walled: Israeli Society at an Impasse*. New York: Other Press.

Emerson, Gloria, 1991. *Gaza—A Year in the Intifada: A Personal Account from an Occupied Land*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press.

Frangi, Abdallah, 1983. *The PLO and Palestine*. London: Zed Books.

Giacaman, George, and Dag Jorund Lonning (eds), 1998. *After Oslo: New Realities, Old Problems*. London: Pluto Press.

Gorenberg, Gershom, 2006. *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977*. New York: Times Books.

Hroub, Khaled, 2000. *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.

Khalidi, Walid, 1984. *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876–1948*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestinian Studies.

——, 1992. *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestinian Studies.

Kurz, Anat N., 2005. *Fatah and the Politics of Violence: The Institutionalization of a Popular Struggle*. Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, and Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies.

Lesch, Ann Mosely and Mark Tessler, 1989. *Israel, Egypt and the Palestinians: From Camp David to Intifada*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Masalha, Nur, 2002. *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*. London: Pluto Press.

Morris, Benny, 1987. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nusseibeh, Sari, 2007. *Once Upon a Country: a Palestinian Life*. New York: Macmillan.

O'Balance, Edgar, 1998. *The Palestinian Intifada*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc.

Oren, Michael, 2002. *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pappe, Ilan, 2006. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: One World Publications.

Philo, Greg and Mike Berry, 2004. *Bad News from Israel*. London: Pluto Press.
Reinhart, Tanya, 2006. *The Road Map to Nowhere: Israel/Palestine Since 2003*. London: Verso.
Rubenberg, Cheryl, 2003. *The Palestinians: In Search of a Just Peace*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
Said, Edward, 1980. *The Question of Palestine*. New York: Random House Inc.
Schulz, Helena Lindholm and Juliane Hammer, 2003. *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland*. New York: Routledge.
Selwyn, Ilan and Moshe Shemesh, 1999. *The Suez–Sinai Crisis, 1956*. New York: Routledge.
Shlaim, Avi, 2001. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
Tayeh, Abdallah, 2001. *Moon in Beit Daras*. Gaza: The Palestinian Writers Union and UNDP.

Index

Compiled by Sue Carlton

MB refers to Mohammed Baroud, father of the author

Abbas, Mahmoud 175–6, 177, 182–3
Abdel-Nasser, Gamal 45–6, 48, 51, 56–7, 63–4, 102
  and 1967 war 72, 73, 79, 80, 82
  death of 90, 92
  and fall of Beit Daras 37
  and pan-Arabism 69, 80
  support for Fatah 82
  and War of Attrition 90
Abdullah, King of Transjordan 46–7
Abu Ashraf 180–1
Abu Assad 119
Abu Fahd 119–20
Abu Ghunaym 162
Abu Jihad 148
Acre 18
Agreement on Movement and Access 181
Ahli Arab Hospital 134, 144
airplane hijackings 90
Alexander the Great 50
Alexander Janneus 50
Algeria
  guerrilla war 81
  support for Fatah 82–3
Allenby, General Sir Edmund 6
Allon Plan 97–8
Allon, Yigal 97
Amir, Yigal 159
Anglo-American Committee 30
Al-Aqsa Mosque 161, 166
Arab Higher Committee (AHC) 17, 19
Arab League 25, 70
  Palestine Committee 36
  Technical Military Committee 31
Arab Liberation Army (ALA) 33, 35–6, 37
Arab Nationalist Movement 69
Arab Socialist Union 51
Arab Voice news 2
Arabs
  and boycott campaign against Gaza 186
  oil as economic weapon 104
  unity 90, 103
Arafat, Yasser 103, 174–6, 182
  addressing UN General Assembly 146–7
  death of 174–5, 176, 177
  destruction of Ramallah headquarters 169
  and Fatah 80–1, 82, 83
  and Hebron massacre 160
  and peace process 134, 151, 154, 155, 158, 159, 173
  and PLO 106–7
  and role in Intifadas 133, 166, 172
  talks with Barak (2000) 163, 166, 172
  undermined by Netanyahu 161
Ariel settlement 180
Arish 52, 63
al-Assad, Hafez 103
Ayn Jalut, battle of (1260) 5
Ayn Jalut brigade 70
Ayyash, Yahya 160

Ba'ath Party 69, 88
Baker, James 147, 148
Balfour, Arthur James 10
Balfour Declaration 11, 17, 20, 21
al-Banna, Abd al-Rahman 62
al-Banna, Hasan 62, 63
Bar-Lev, General Chaim 103
Bar-Lev Line 103–4
Barak, Ehud 163, 166–7, 172
Barghouti, Marwan 182–3
Baroud, Abd al-Rahman 64
Baroud, Ahmad (brother of MB) 13, 15–16, 23, 43, 46, 71
Baroud, Anwar (first son of MB) 87–8, 99
  death of 93–4
Baroud, Anwar (second son of MB) 94, 95, 129, 138, 166
Baroud clan 7, 8–9
Baroud, Mohammed
  birth of 13, 14, 16
  as a boy in Gaza 40, 42–3, 46–7
    childhood memories 23–4
    rebelliousness 43–4, 46–7
    wish to become freedom fighter 46, 47–8, 49
  confined to Gaza 120
  death of 188
  education
    reading 57, 64, 70–1, 127
    self-education 46, 49, 70

family life
falling in love 57–8, 61
engagement 61–2
wedding 68
birth of first son 87–8
Anwar's death 94
living in Ramallah 96
buying house in Gaza 99
physical violence 116–17
and children's education 125–6, 129
contact with children in later years 165–6
as a fighter
in Egyptian army 56–7
in PLA 71–5
escape from Israeli bombardment (1967) 74, 77–8
assumed dead after 1967 war 84
return to Gaza from Egypt after 1967 war 84–5
and flight from Beit Daras (1948) 38–9
health problems 87, 93, 127, 151, 153, 180–1, 187
later life
and bombing of power plant 153, 187
impact of blockade 187
overcome by tear gas 169
letter from Nasser 45–6, 57
letters to Nasser 57
lineage 15
meeting with Shabak officer 119–20
mistrust of politicians 169–70
and politics
Arafat 174–6
communism 64–5
Hamas 176–7
National Leadership Committee 117
poverty 70–1, 94, 95, 125–6, 151
relationship with Ahmad 13, 16, 43, 46
reporting to Israeli military 85–6
speech to comrades 86
watching news of Lebanon war on TV 109–10
working life
selling knick-knacks 44, 46, 48, 53
leaving Gaza (1956) 51–3
staying with family in Sinai 53–4
return home from Sinai 54–5
journey to Saudi Arabia 64–5
in Mecca 64–7
with American family in Jeddah 67
return to Gaza from Jeddah 67–8
return to Saudi Arabia after 1967 war 87–8
selling falafels in Saudi Arabia 92–3
return to Gaza 93
gravel digging business 93, 94
selling carpets in West Bank 95–7
importing goods from Israel 100–1
business trips to Israel 100, 139–40
Baroud, Mohammed (father of MB) 1, 2–3, 6–7, 12–13
and armed resistance 33
birth of eldest son 15–16
and birth of second son 16
and business travel 22, 23, 29
death of 129
and education 6, 7–8, 16
and flight from Beit Daras 1, 2, 37–8, 39
land ownership 12, 15, 30
and Mohammed's (MB) return 55–6
name changes 7–9
Baroud, Muneer (brother of MB) 2
Baroud, Muneer (son of MB) 135–6, 138
Baroud, Ramzy (author/son of MB)
birth of 94
decision to leave Gaza for US 153–4
dreaming of liberation 140
and Intifada 131–3
originally named George 94, 99–100
phone calls to father (MB) from America 152–3, 187–8
writing poetry 128, 153
Baroud, Suma (daughter of MB) 74–5, 93–4, 95
at UNWRA school 99, 100
birth of 71, 95
as doctor 153, 165
during 1967 war 72, 78, 79
escape from Khan Yunis 168
studying medicine 125–6, 129
Baroud, Thaer (son of MB) 95, 129
Baroud, Zarefah (wife of MB-formerly Zarefah Tayeh) 14, 59–62, 70–1, 101, 127, 132–3, 187
beaten by soldiers 143–4
birth of Anwar 87–8
and cancer 144
death of Anwar 94
death and burial of 145
during 1967 war 72, 74–5, 178–9
family's flight from Beit Daras 59
financial worries 86
hiding after 1967 war 78–9
and Israeli attack 74–5
and MB's business trips to Israel 100–1
and MB's physical violence 110, 116–17
and Mohammed's return from Saudi Arabia 67–8
move to Ramallah 96

Baroud, Zarefah (wife of MB-formerly Zarefah Tayeh) *continued*
and return of MB after 1967 war 84–5
and student clashes 121–2
wedding 68
work in textile factory 61
Baroud, Zeinab (mother of MB) 1, 12–13, 15–16, 23–4, 55
death of 129
flight from Beit Daras 37–8, 39, 40
and MB's engagement 61
relationship with MB 44, 55
work 43
Beach Refugee Camp 91
Begin, Menachem 114, 115, 118, 130
Beit Daras 1–2, 3–6, 12, 23, 56, 129
and 1939 White Paper 22
and birth records 14–15
and British 'police station' 3, 4, 27
clans and lineage 7, 8, 12, 15
during Palestinian uprising (1936–39) 17–18
final battle 33–8
history 5–6
and Jewish neighbors 3–4, 26
markets 3
massacre 34–5, 37
Massriyyen (Egyptian) neighborhood 7–8, 9, 12, 15, 61
and partition plan 29–30
and Plan Dalet 31–8
strategic importance of 26, 27, 31
under Turkish rule 5–6
Ben Gurion, David 1, 22, 24, 32, 33, 34
Ben-Eliezer, Binyamin 168
Bet El settlement 180
Birzeit University 153
Black September, militant group 106
Black September massacre 105
Boumedienne, Houari 103
Britain
military support for Jews 32
repression of Palestinian rebellion (1936–39) 19–20
response to Zionist violence 24–5
role in ethnic cleansing 28
White Paper (1939) 20–3
and Zionist interests 10, 17–23, 24–5, 28, 36
see also Balfour Declaration
British Mandate over Palestine 3, 11, 18, 20, 28, 30, 36
broken bones policy 133, 142–3
buffer zones 77, 98, 99, 171
bulldozers 80, 91, 102, 150, 160, 168
Buraij refugee camp 59, 72, 84
Bush, George H.W. 147
Bush, George W. 175, 180, 182, 184–5
bypass roads 162

cadre formation 124
Camp David Accords (1978) 115, 116, 117, 118, 120
Camp David summit (2000) 163, 172
Castal, battle of (1948) 35
checkpoints 153, 156, 160, 165
Rafah crossing 180–1
children 34–5, 42, 60, 134, 138, 168
Christian Science Monitor 177
circumcision parties 111
Clinton, Bill 163, 172
Communist Party 62, 64, 69, 88, 141
Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 22 10
Crusaders (1099–1187) 5, 50
curfews 130–1, 135, 136–8, 140, 145, 148, 178

dates of birth 14
Dayan, Uzi 180
Declaration of Principles (DoP) 151, 156
Deir al-Balah 41, 151
Deir Yassin massacre 34–5, 114
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) 141
diwans 8, 39, 53

East Jerusalem 95, 98, 146, 157, 158, 161, 162, 166
education 7, 16, 42, 68, 87, 125–6, 153
women and girls 60–1
Egypt 37, 45–6, 73
1973 war 103–5
aid for Gaza 46
defeat (1967) 76–7, 79
and peace process 114–16
and refugees 41
relations with Jordan 106
relations with US 102, 104, 106
retreat from Gaza (1956) 49, 51, 52, 64
revolution (1952) 45–6, 50, 63
see also Abdel-Nasser, Gamal; Sadat, Anwar
Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty (1979) 115
Ein al-Hilweh refugee camp 129
Eretz crossing, Arafat-Barak meeting (1999) 163
Eshkol, Levi 102
Evacuation Treaty (1954) 63

Faisal, King 10, 103
Fallujah 45
Farouk, King of Egypt 45
Fatah 69, 80–3, 88, 105, 142, 154, 158
  activism in West Bank 82–3
  attacks on Israel 82
  clash with Hamas 150, 186
  corruption 174, 177
  and Jordan war 89
  Manifesto 81
  rifts 141, 177, 182–3
  youth movement (Shabiba) 130
  see also Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
Fedayeen 47–9
First Zionist Congress (1897) 10
Fouad al-Bis (Fouad the Cat) 116–17

Galilee 18, 36
Gaza
  and 1967 war 73–5, 77
  Civilian Administration 118, 119
  deaths 131, 171, 172
  and Egyptian retreat (1956) 49, 51, 52, 64
  executive and legislative councils 51, 69
  and Fatah 83
  geopolitical importance 70
  history 44–5, 50
  house demolitions 91, 171
  impact of 1967 war 80
  and Islamic movement 121–2, 125
  Israeli bombing campaign (1955) 48
  Israeli occupation (1956) 48, 50, 63, 64
  Israeli occupation (1967) 77, 79–80, 83–92
  and Israeli settlement policy 83, 98, 99
  leadership vacuum 105
  and Muslim Brotherhood 62, 63
  'no-go' zone 183
  and Palestinian government 47
  and political organization 51
  resistance 49, 70, 72, 88–9, 91, 92
  siege following Hamas election victory 185, 186–7
  strength and resolve 50–1, 120, 170
  strikes 119, 122, 124, 142, 144
  see also Occupied Territories
Gaza City 3, 41, 117, 130, 131, 133, 144, 156
General Central Committee to Aid Palestine 62–3
Ghadaffi, Colonel Muamar 103
Gilad, Amos 173
Givti 33
Golan Heights 77, 79, 104
Goldstein, Baruch 159
Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) 98, 113
Gush Katif settlement bloc 167

Haaretz 173
Habash, George 83, 99
Haganah 19, 22, 27, 30, 33, 35–6, 182
Haifa 12, 18, 36, 116
al-Haj Ahmed, Fatima (Um 'Adel) 3–4, 6, 12, 32, 34
Hamas 64, 130, 138–9, 142, 148
  assassination of leaders 160, 170–1
  clash with Fatah forces 150, 186
  and elections 176–7, 183–4
  and Oslo Accords 176
  and Palestinian Authority (PA) 158, 159, 179
  and suicide bombings 160, 177
Har Homa settlement 162
Haram al-Sharif 11, 166
Hashomer (Watchman) 30
Hattin brigade 70
Hebron 9, 26, 37, 63, 96
  mosque killings 159–60
Herzl, Theodor 9–10
Hitler, Adolf 29
Holocaust 29
house demolitions 91, 161, 171
Hugo, Victor 57
Hussein, King of Jordan 89, 90, 106
Hussein, Saddam 147–8
al-Husseini, Abd al-Qadir 35
al-Husseini, Haj Amin 17, 18, 47, 62

al-Ifriqi, Tariq 33
International Court of Justice 29
Intifada (1987) 121, 125, 128–38
  beginnings of 131–3
  bomb squads 135–7
  casualties 129, 131, 133, 134
  end of 150–1
  explanations of 129–31
  organization 133–4, 139
  see also UNC
  role of PLO 133, 146, 147
  weapons 134–5
Intifada (2000–) 166–7, 176, 182
  casualties 167, 168, 169, 170, 171
Iranian revolution (1979) 124
Iraq, invasion of Kuwait (1990) 147–8
Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization) 22, 24, 35, 36, 114
Iron Fist policy 133, 134
Islamic Center, Gaza 122–3
Islamic Compound 123, 130

Islamic Jihad 124, 130–1
Islamic movement 121–4, 125, 126, 130, 160
  and Intifada 133, 138–9
  and peace process 149, 158
  society-building 122
  transformation to violent movement 123–5
Islamic University of Gaza 121–2
Israel
  attack on Arab countries (1967) 73
  attempts to create Palestinian 'leaders' 105, 112, 118, 147
  attitude to Islamic movement 123
  bombing campaign in Gaza (1955) 48
  and cheap Palestinian labor 86–7
  'concessions' to Palestinians 146, 159, 160–1, 166, 173
  disengagement plan 169–70, 171, 172, 173, 176, 177–80, 182
  expansion 20, 27, 48, 73, 79–80, 98, 167
    see also Israel, settlement policy
  Fedayeen attacks 47–8
  and intelligence 104, 119, 121
  intervention in Lebanon (1976) 108, 109
  occupation of South Lebanon (1978) 108, 115
  and PLO 106
  political change 114
  and return to 1949 armistice lines 80, 180
  security wall 169
  and self-defense 48, 168
  settlement policy 97, 98, 102, 114, 130, 156–7, 162–3, 167
    dismantling of settlements 158, 163, 176, 177–9
    'fingers' concept 98, 99
    in Gaza 83, 167, 170
    and wall 169
    in West Bank 114, 173, 180
  shooting down of Libyan airliner 103
  state of 37
  targeted assassinations 117, 148, 160, 163, 170–1
  US support 76, 102, 104, 134–5, 173, 179–80
  use of tear gas 130, 133, 134–5, 145, 167–8, 169
  victory in 1967 war 79–80
  violence against Gaza and West Bank 78, 89, 91, 105, 113, 167, 171
  weapons used against Intifada 134–5
  withdrawal from Gaza (1957) 48–9
  withdrawal from Gaza (1994) 156
  see also Zionists
Israeli Civilian Administration 120
Izz al-Din al-Qassam movement 139
  see also al-Qassam, Izz al-Din

Jabaliya refugee camp 128, 131, 138, 171
Jaffa 3, 9, 12, 18, 36
Jerusalem 6, 9, 12, 36, 77, 150, 156, 158, 166, 180
Jewish Agency 11, 19, 24, 25, 30
Jewish National Fund 10
Jewish National Home in Palestine 18, 20–1
Jewish National Land Fund 21
Jewish nationalism 79
Jewish Settlement Police (JSP) 19
Jewish settlers
  attack by Islamic Jihad member 131
  attacks on refugee camps 167
  evacuation from Gaza 177–9
Jewish State 9–10, 11, 18, 24, 25, 28–9, 30
  recognition of 37
Jordan 73, 77, 89–91, 105, 106

Kach movement 159
Kadima party 182
Karameh (Jordan) 83
Karantina massacre (Lebanon) 109
Kfar Darom settlement 83
Khalaf, Karim 97, 112–13, 117
Khalaf, Salah (Abu Iyad) 81
Khaled ibn al-Walid High School for Boys 128, 131–2
Khalidi, Walid 11, 36
Khan Yunis 3, 41, 48, 52
Khan Yunis refugee camp 165, 167–8
Khartoum summit (1967) 82
King-Crane Commission of Inquiry 10
Kiryat Arba settlement 98, 180
Kissinger, Henry 102, 103, 104, 105, 106
Kurtzer, Daniel 179–80
Kuwait, Iraqi invasion (1990) 147–8

Labor Party (Israel) 80, 114, 130, 160, 163
land confiscation 28, 113, 130, 160, 162, 169
Land Day 113
League of Nations Council 11
Lebanon 36, 107–9
  civil war (1975–90) 107–9, 115–16, 123
  departure of PLO 121, 141
  history of 108
  Israeli occupation (1978) 108, 109, 115, 123
  Israeli occupation (1982) 120, 123, 124
  massacres 120, 182

and Palestinian resistance fighters 90, 91, 105, 109, 112
refugee camps attacked 129
Libya, support for Fatah 82–3
Likud Party 114, 118, 130, 160–3, 182

Ma'ale Adumim settlement 180
Madrid Conference (1991) 149–50
al-Majdal 3, 33
Malka, Amos 173
Malley, Robert 172
Mamluks 5
al-Maqadima clan 12
Martyrs Graveyard 120, 125, 165
martyrs/martyrdom 47, 84, 131, 145, 160, 172
'maximum Arab program' 103, 106
Mecca 64–7
Meir, Golda 102
Mishmar Haemek 36
Morris, Benny 1, 33–4
mosque building 122
Mossad 119
mukhtar 8, 9, 39
Muslim Brotherhood 62–4, 69, 81, 121, 122, 123, 124
Al-Mustaqbal (the Future) 183

Nablus 96, 113
al-Nakba (the Catastrophe) 2, 63, 167, 188
al-Naksa (the Setback) 77, 80, 88
Nassar, Abu Mansi 35
National Charter (PLO) 69–70
National Committees (Palestine) 17
National Leadership Committee (Palestine) 117, 118
Negev 26, 31
Netanyahu, Benjamin 159, 160–2
Netzarim settlement 99, 178–9
new world order 148, 149
Nixon, Richard 104
Nobel Peace Prize 115, 155
November Massacre (1994) 163–4
Nuseirat Beach Casino, meeting at 111–12, 117
Nuseirat refuge camp 2, 72
bombing of power plant 187
and evacuation of settlements 178–9
and settlement construction 99, 157
and start of first Intifada 132

Occupied Territories 77, 95, 148
annexation 98, 130
elections (1976) 112–13
and Hamas 177, 179
Israeli settlement construction 97, 130, 156–7, 166
and Israeli withdrawal 82, 148, 158, 163
and Israeli-Egyptian peace negotiations 116
and Madrid conference 149
nationalist movement 117–18
and Oslo Accords 157, 158–9
and PLO 105, 107, 112, 120–1, 123
and political change 113–14
resistance 117–18
see also Inifadas
see also East Jerusalem; Gaza; West Bank
oil
as economic weapon 104
and employment 68, 92
and funding for Islamic movement projects 122
Operation Barak 36
Operation Chametz 36
Operation Days of Penitence 171
Operation Defensive Wall 169
Operation Harel 31, 35
Operation Jevussi 36
Operation Lightning 33–4
Operation Litani 115–16
Operation Maccabi 36
Operation Misparayim 36
Operation Nachshon 31, 35
Operation Yiftach 36
Organization of African Unity 103
Organization of Non-Allied States 103
Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) 104
Orientalism 17
al-Osaji, Ali Mohammed Hussain 35
Oslo Accords 107, 134, 151, 153, 154–61, 165, 176
alternatives 157–8
'concessions' to Palestinians 159, 160–1
final status talks 160
and fragmentation of Palestinian identity 158–9
hollow symbols 155–6
and Israeli settlement policy 156–7
and marginalization of PLO 154–5
protests against 164
see also peace process
Ottoman Empire 10

Palestine
birth records 14–15
ethnic cleansing 11, 27, 28, 31, 36, 98, 130
land ownership 15, 28

Palestine *continued*
National Committees 17
and partition plan 18–19, 24, 28–9, 30–1
and political change 113–14
renaming of places 98
Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) 70, 72, 73, 88
Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) 88, 140
Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) 69–70, 73
armed struggle 72–3
competition between supporters and Islamic groups 121–2, 125
and elections (1976) 112–13
and Fatah leadership 80–2, 83, 89, 106–7
growing influence of 123
and Intifada 133, 141, 142, 146, 147
and Iraqi invasion of Kuwait 147–8
and Jordan war 89–91, 105
in Lebanon 105, 107–9
and legitimacy 106–7, 113
marginalized after Oslo Accords 154–5
shift to Occupied Territories 120–1
split 105, 106
and war with Jordan 89–91, 105
Palestine National Congress (PNC) 69, 70, 83, 106, 146, 148
Palestine National Front (PNF) 112, 113, 118
Palestinian Arab Higher Committee 47
Palestinian Authority (PA) 154–5, 157, 159, 160, 167
and corruption 157, 158, 184
and disengagement plan 170
and killing of Oslo protesters (1994) 164
power struggle with Hamas 179
and Road Map for peace 175
and travel permits 180, 181
and Wye Memorandum 161–2
Palestinian Legislative Council 157
Palestinian state 146, 158, 173
international recognition of 147
see also Palestine, partition plan
Palestinians
and 2005 elections 175–6, 183–4
as cheap labor in Israel 86–7
and civil disobedience 17, 19, 119, 133
collaborators 85, 105, 113, 116, 118, 139, 154
in detention centers 19–20, 25
displacement 11
see also refugee camps; refugees
employment in Arab Gulf countries 68–9
and freedom of movement 181
and international aid 171, 186
mass exodus (1948) 36, 37, 38–9, 40–1, 76
military preparedness 30, 31
misrepresentation 172–3
moderates 97, 99, 118, 157
and nationalism 20, 69, 81, 98
and poverty 45, 54, 70, 86, 95, 125–6, 154, 171
resistance 12, 17–20, 97, 167
self-awareness 68–71
strikes 17–18, 22, 117, 119, 142, 144
general strike (1936) 17, 18, 49
general strike (1981) 122, 124
and unity 99–100
uprising (1936–39) 16–20, 62–3
Pan Arab Congress 10
pan-Arabism 54, 62, 64, 69, 79, 80, 139
Pappe, Ilan 27–8
passive resistance 124
peace process 106, 114–16, 159
and 2005 elections 175–6
failure of 166
and return of Labor government 163
and return of Likud 160–3
see also Camp David Accords; Camp David summit; Oslo Accords
Peel Commission report (1937) 18–19
Peres, Shimon 130, 155, 156, 159, 175
Plan Dalet (D) 30, 31, 35, 36
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) 83, 88, 90, 99, 141
rejectionist front 106
population transfers 18–19, 98, 105
pragmatism 97, 102, 105, 106, 165, 176

Qadisiyyah brigade 70
al-Qassam, Izz al-Din 12
see also Izz al-Din al-Qassam movement
al-Qawukji, Fawzi 36
Quakers 41
Qur'an 7, 40, 53, 54, 136

Rabin, Yitzhak 112, 130, 133, 134, 155, 156, 159
Rafah 63
border crossing 180–1
Ramallah 96–7, 99
Arafat's headquarters 169, 174
al-Ramleh 9
Rantisi, Audeh 97, 112
al-Rantissi, Abdel Aziz 171
refugee camps, Israeli raids after 1967 war 84
refugees
after 1967 war 80
braving the fences 42

exploitation of 41, 43
hope in PLA 72
impact on original inhabitants 45
and international aid 41–2
Jordanian option 98
need for birth dates 14–15
right to return 146, 180
Rice, Condoleezza 181, 184, 185
Rishon le Zion 140
Road Map for peace 175
Robertson, Pat 115
Rogers Plan 90, 102
Rothschild, Edmund, Baron de 26
Rothschild, Lionel Walter, 2nd Baron 10
Russian literature 57

Sa'ad clan 7
Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, massacre 109
sacred trust of civilization 10
Sadat, Anwar 97, 101–3, 104–5, 106
and peace process 109, 114–16
Saladin 50
Saudi Arabia 62
MB's trips to 64–5, 87–8, 92–3
support for Fatah 83
Sayeret Metkal units 148
self-determination 10, 29, 106, 146
shabab (youth culture) 118, 121
Shabak (Shin Bet) 119
Shabiba (Fatah youth movement) 130
al-Shafi, Dr. Haidar Abd 51, 149
Shakaa, Bassam 97, 112–13, 117
Shamir, Yitzhak 130, 133, 147
Sharm el-Sheikh (2005 summit) 176
Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum (1999) 163
Sharon, Ariel 91–2, 163
disengagement plan 169–70, 171, 172, 173, 177–8, 181–2
'fingers' concept 99
and human rights violations 109, 182
incursions into West Bank 169
as man of peace 182
as prime minister 166–7
stroke 182
visit to Muslim shrine 166
and Wye Memorandum 161–2
Shehada, Salah 139
al-Shuqairi, Ahmad 70, 72, 82
Sinai 48, 63, 77, 79, 98, 99
Israeli withdrawal 102, 104
MB's trip to 52–4
Soviet Union 62, 80, 147
Special Night Squad 19
Stern Gang 22, 24, 35, 130
Strait of Tiran 73
'The Structure of Revolutionary Construction' 81
Suez Canal, war of attrition (1968–70) 90, 102
Suez crisis (1956) 48, 76–7
suicide bombings 160, 169, 177
Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) 10
Syria 36, 73, 77, 90
and 1973 war 103
intervention in Lebanon (1976) 108, 109
support for Fatah 82–3

Tabiyya 3–4, 12, 18, 26–8
tabu (deed) 15
Tayeh, Abdullah 4, 5–6, 39
Tayeh, Mariam (Zarefah's mother) 59–60, 61, 72, 145
Tayeh, Mohammed (Zarefah's father) 59
Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp (Lebanon) 109
Tiberias 32
Transjordan 11, 18, 36, 47
Truman, Harry 24, 37
Tsemeh, Dr. 4, 12

United National Command of the Uprising (UNC) 141–2, 148
United National Front (Palestine) 88
United Nations (UN) 28, 41
Charter 146
Emergency Force (UNEF) 48–9, 73
and Israeli withdrawal from Occupied Territories 103
Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) 181
Relief and Work Agency (UNWRA) 41–2, 60, 62, 95, 99, 134
Resolution 181 28, 29, 30
Resolution 194 180
Resolution 242 82, 98, 102, 104, 105, 146, 151
Resolution 338 104, 146, 151
Resolution 1322 166
US veto 103, 167
United States (US)
intelligence failure 104
and new world order 148
pacification of Egypt 105
and peace process 162–3
recognition of state of Israel 37
response to Palestinian elections (2005) 184–5
support for Israel 76, 102, 104, 134–5, 173, 179–80
support for Jordan 90

United States (US) *continued*
support for Zionist cause 24, 25
and withdrawal of foreign forces from Sinai 48

Village Leagues 118, 121
Voice of Arab Radio 72–3

Wailing Wall 11
al-Wazir, Khalil (Abu Jihad) 81
Weisglass, Dov 173
Weitz, Joseph 21–2
West Bank
and 1967 war 73, 77, 79, 95
annexation 162, 170
Civil Administration 117
and Fatah 82–3
and Hamas 139
Israeli incursions (2002) 169
and Israeli redeployment 163
and Israeli settlement policy 98
Jewish extremists 117
MB's trips to 84–5, 95
and Muslim Brotherhood 63
and Palestinian territorial rights 179–80
village evacuations 77, 98
see also Occupied Territories
Whole Land of Israel (WLIM) 80
Wilson, Woodrow 10
Woodhead Commission 19
World War I 5
World War II 22, 29
World Zionist Organization (WZO) 10
Wye Memorandum Agreement (1998) 161–2

Yassin, Sheikh Ahmed 64, 123, 124, 138, 148, 158
assassination of 170–1
al-Yazuri, Um Mohammed 32, 33, 35
Yom Kippur 103

Zionist Revisionist Party 11, 22
Zionists
campaign against British 21, 24
imperial expansion 80
lobbying in US 24
military campaign in Palestine 25
military preparedness 30
and partition plan 28, 29
reaction to 1939 White Paper 21–2
settler colonies 27–8
Zionist program 9–12, 17, 20, 30